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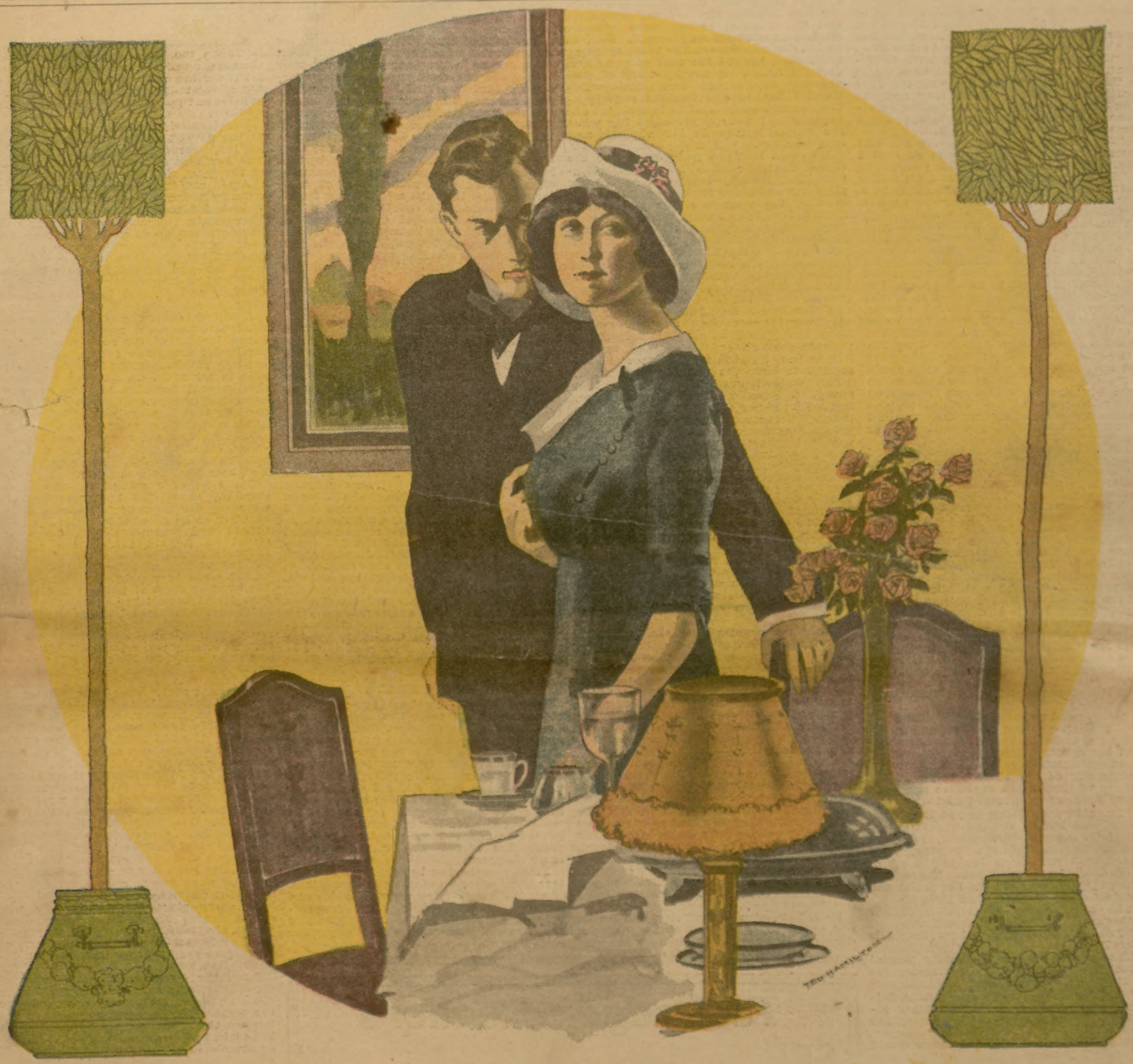

"Can't you take me a little bit on trust?

The White Slavers

Or, THE SERPENT'S CHARM

By H. Holly Smith

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CHAPTER I

SILAS HASSYBROCK, Esq., Justice of the Peace, Notary Public, etc., etc., as the various signs in the dusty window of his little side street office denoted him, had a task—to hold down his temper as the mercury boiled up; to busy himself without exertion; to pore over musty papers and keep his throat moist and his collar dry at the same time.

Here was a task for any man on the first hot day of summer, and he momentarily speculated on the hotter days to come as he rose wearily to release a large green fly imprisoned between the sashes of the open window, whose fitful droning was anything but soothing to the judicial temper.

Sterling City lay gasping in the sun, surrounded by oceans of green young corn and a glittering river on the west. Low-built houses cast no shadows across a broad expanse of blazing street. Scorching pavements glared into the eyes of squinting men who ducked from one awning to another.

An aged negro shuffled wearily down the street clinging to a strip of shade.

"Lawdy, ain't she sizzlin'!" he muttered, as he dived for the shade under a protecting awning in front of the squire's office. He mopped his beaded brow with a red bandanna and entered. "Howdy, Judge?"

"Howdy, Uncle Manuel? Sit down?" The old Judge nodded without taking his feet from the window-sill. The darky stood for a moment mopping his brow.

"Judge, Miss Hazel says foh you to come ovah to the house. Doctah White he's theah, an' I reckon dey ol' man's mos' gone, Judge."

"All right, Manuel, bring my horse around front and I'll go over right away."

The negro shuffled toward the rear door to comply with this request, and a moment later the old man rose, and taking his hat from its peg on the wall stepped out on the glaring street, where he climbed stiffly into the waiting rig and drove away.

Arriving before a small cottage on a quiet, shady street, the Judge got out,

hitched the old roan horse to a tree, and turned to the neat graveled walk leading to the house. A young girl of perhaps eighteen or nineteen years stood for a moment framed in the door of the cottage, then came down the walk to meet him.

"Oh, Judge, I'm so glad you came so soon! Father asked for you, and I sent Uncle Manuel right away. Doctor White has been here since ten o'clock, and I'm so afraid he's sinking again." Her lips trembled and tears filled her eyes as she greeted him.

"There, there, child, don't you worry! He'll be better soon." The old man patted her shoulder affectionately and followed her into the house.

Entering a darkened bedroom he stood for a moment gazing at the sunken cheeks and bright, feverish eyes of the wasted figure on the bed. A woman rose as he entered and placed her finger to her lips warningly. The sick man noted her action and turned his gaze to the door.

"Come in, Silas," he said, with an effort. "I knew you'd come at once."

The woman withdrew closing the door softly behind her. For a long moment the two men gazed at each other in silence, then the older man sat down heavily at the side of the bed.

"The end is drawing near, Silas, and I want to arrange my affairs as best I can. That's why I send for you."

"Hush, Tom; you must not talk like that. You'll rally and be out again in a few weeks." The other spoke with a visible effort to appear cheerful.

The sick man shook his head sadly.

"I won't last the night out. I feel it, I know it. This is the end, so there is no use in building false hopes." He breathed heavily for a few moments, and then continued: "I'm ready to go, but my poor little orphan girl—I'm afraid there won't be much left for her after all the creditors are satisfied. You know how things have gone with me since the crash two years ago, and this long illness has eaten up most everything that was left. Promise me, Silas, that you'll take care of her. From boyhood we've stood by each other through times that have tried the hearts of both of us, and I shall rest easy in my last moments if I have your word that you will see her through."

The old squire wiped his eyes, and grasping the wasted hand that lay upon the coverlet gave his lifelong friend the desired promise without a moment's hesitation.

A half-hour later he arose, and again taking the wasted hand in his own stood silent a moment by the bedside, then withdrew. He looked years older as he came down the neat graveled walk from the house. The weight of years and the sorrow of the day bowed his head, and he groped a moment with blurred sight at the hitch-strap before getting into the rig to return to his stifling office.

Two weeks later Silas Hassybrock received a call from the daughter of his late lamented friend, Thomas Dodge. As the shadow of her slight, girlish figure fell across his littered desk he turned to take account of his visitor, and seeing who it was rose quickly with outstretched hand.

"Why, good morning, Hazel. Take this chair, dear. I was just arranging to come out and see you this afternoon." He met her quick, admiring glance, and almost unconsciously he noted the depth and purity of her clear hazel eyes, the beauty of her girlish oval face and light wavy hair, as he greeted her.

"I've sold everything as you instructed me to, and have just finished settling up the bills against the estate, and——" The Judge hesitated a minute, then added with a nervous laugh: "I might as well be frank with you. There isn't much left to turn over to the 'heirs and assigns' of the late Thomas Dodge."

The girl winced at mention of her father's name, but smiled sadly.

"Tell me, Judge, just how much is there?"

The old justice made a hasty mental calculation, adding in his customary fee in such cases before replying.

"Only about a hundred and fifty dollars, daughter." He glanced at her inquiringly. "Have you made any plans for the future?"

"Yes. I hardly dared hope there would be much left for me, so I have decided to go to the city and find work of some kind. I hardly know what I shall be able to do, but I am sure I am capable of making my own way," she replied, trying to speak lightly.

For a long time the old squire sought to convince her of the folly of such a course, but Hazel proved obdurate and he finally yielded, consenting to the plan reluctantly and with grave misgivings.

"Well, if you are determined to go, here's an itemized account of the proceeds from the sale of your father's effects, together with a list of the bills paid, and here's what is left of the money," he at length remarked, taking several bills from his own worn leather wallet and slipping them into an envelope with the others.

Hazel took the papers, and bidding the old squire good-by left the office.

"I'll go the first thing in the morning, before any one else tries to dissuade me," she murmured decisively, as she hurried home.

Next morning Hazel rose early, and dragging forth the ancient horsehair trunk which had served the family on occasional trips for two generations, was busy for an hour selecting and packing the things for her journey.

Having seen her baggage depart for the station, she at last came out of the house and locked the front door. Tears filled her eyes as she stood at the gate a moment gazing back yearningly at the tiny vine-covered cottage where for the past five years she and her half-invalid father had been so happy. A great aching sense of loneliness filled her as she thought of him again, the patient, studious man who had filled the place of both father and mother for almost as long as she could remember. How desolate the place had seemed since his death. She shut the gate resolutely and hastened away, lest her sorrow should again overcome her.

The girl stopped a few minutes at Silas Hassybrock's office to leave the key for the new tenants and bid the old squire and a few other of her more intimate friends an affectionate farewell. Half an hour later she was on the train speeding northward toward the goal of her hopes and ambitions. A novel feeling of suppressed excitement and anticipation thrilled her, as she thought eagerly of the experiences and adventures she vaguely felt were in store for her when she should arrive in her strange new surroundings.

When at last the train drew into the Grand Central station, late in the afternoon, Hazel stepped down from the car platform and stood for a moment bewildered by the strange sights and sounds around her; then gathering up her luggage was swept unresisting down the platform and through the great iron gates into the magnificent pillared waiting-room by the never-ending throng of passengers disgorged by incoming trains. Pausing there for a moment to get her breath, she again fell in with the crowd, and was swept on down the stairs and out the great entrance onto the sidewalk. Here she gazed about her helplessly; then, to escape from the pushing, trampling crowd, hurried up the street which seemed to have the fewest people on it.

She walked several blocks up this street, a squalid, dirty thoroughfare, flanked on either side by a motley collection of three and four-story buildings whose first floors were given over with unvaried monotony to a series of pawn shops, pool halls, saloons and grimy, ill-smelling lunchrooms. At length she paused and stood for a moment on a corner gazing up and down each street, hardly knowing what she sought. As she stood thus undecided, she was startled to hear some one addressing her.

"Pardon me, but were you looking for some street?"

The girl turned quickly to glance up into the face of a big, blue-coated policeman. He tipped his helmet respectfully and added, with a broad smile which cheered her considerably, "Perhaps you're lost?"

"No-o, not exactly lost," she answered, "but I was looking for a place to stop. I'm a stranger here, you know."

"Um, not a very desirable neighborhood for a young lady to find lodgings in, I'm afraid." He stood silent for a minute thinking, while a crowd of noisy rowdies brushed past them, then shook his head. "If I could leave my beat for a little while I could show you a fairly decent place."

"Perhaps you could direct me to some other part of the city where I could find a suitable place?" Hazel remarked, casually.

"I don't think it's safe for a girl like you to be looking for a room alone. Too many things can happen to a stranger here, especially in this part of town. But I think I can show you a place that will do for tonight, and when I go home I'll look around for a place for you out in a nice quiet neighborhood where I live."

He led the way around on a side street and up a grimy flight of stairs, where a dirty, hard-featured old woman answered his ring. He took her aside and talked earnestly for a few minutes, receiving full assurance that the young lady would not be molested in any way while there. After again cautioning Hazel of the danger of trusting strangers, or of talking with them of her affairs, he arranged to meet her the next evening; then, after giving her directions for finding a nearby cafe where she could obtain a good meal at moderate cost, returned to his beat.

The old woman led the way to a stuffy-smelling room on the third floor, after he had gone, and depositing the luggage on a table and raising the one dirty window in the room, withdrew, with a covert glance at her new lodger. Being rather hungry by this time, Hazel soon found the cafe of which the policeman had spoken, and after a hasty lunch fared forth to see something of the city by night.

She noticed that it was a few minutes after seven by the huge illuminated clock on a corner in the busy shopping center where she at length paused. The never-ending throng which brushed hurriedly past her and the long lines of clanging street cars, packed with their human freight, which moved down the street in snail-like procession, filled her with confusion, and she thought, "Where can they all be going?" Then overcome by her loneliness she began eagerly scanning each passing face with a sort of half-formed hope that she might see a familiar one there. No one in the laughing, jostling crowd looked at all familiar, however, and none seemed to notice her as they hurried by, and again she felt the loneliness stealing upon her.

"Oh, daddy, daddy, how I wish you were here!" she sobbed softly.

"This will never do," she murmured, as she mentally shook herself and again moved on, gazing in awe at the wonderful displays in the brilliantly lighted windows. She stopped before the plate-glass front of a great cafe and stood for a long time watching the brilliant scene within. The beautiful women with their fashionable evening gowns and sparkling jewels held her spellbound in admiration. The shrinking, lonely figure in the plain home-made gown was a sharp contrast to the gay figures which flitted constantly in and out of the elaborate cafe.

"What a glorious life that must be!" the girl thought, as the soft strains of music floated out to her through the open doors. "Perhaps, who knows, some day I may be one of them," she murmured.

After losing her bearings several times, Hazel at last found the little restaurant where she had dined before going downtown, and she noticed in passing that it was almost ten o'clock. Hastily mounting the stairs to her room, she quickly undressed, and kneeling a moment prayed God and her own dear daddy for guidance in her new surroundings; then putting out the light she was soon dreaming happy dreams of the hidden future which lay before her.

CHAPTER II.

When Hazel awoke the sun was streaming in through the smudgy window. She arose at once, determined if possible to secure a position the first day. Having decided to try her fortunes first at a famous department store whose name had long been familiar to her, she made a hasty toilet and set out in high hopes. Arriving there after a long walk she stood for several moments idly watching the stream of humanity which poured in and out the great doors. Already the street was thronged with early shoppers.

Finally gathering her courage, she entered, and after wandering for some time through a bewildering maze of tables and counters found herself near the elevators. Approaching the starter timidly she inquired where she should apply for employment.

"Supuntendent's office, ninth floor, eight to ten."

He nodded. "Going up!" As she hesitated he pushed her gently into the cage. The iron doors clanged and the lift shot upward.

"Ninth floor?"

Hazel stepped out. The iron doors clanged again and the car went on up. A sudden panic seized her. She noticed that she was trembling.

"Perhaps it's already after ten o'clock," she thought.

The car stopped. The doors slid open. "Going down!" shouted the youth inside.

Mechanically Hazel stepped into the empty car. The young man gave her a friendly smile and leaned for a moment idly on his starting lever before closing the gates.

"Nothin' doin' this morning, kiddo?" he asked.

Hazel shook her head.

"That's too bad. Say, I know where there's a swell job you might land. Meet me under the clock at the northwest corner of the building at six-thirty tonight, and I'll put you onto it." He winked familiarly.

Hazel merely frowned her displeasure at the youth's crude attempt to engage her in conversation, and did not reply. It was her first experience with that pest of the great city, the "masher."

Again out on the street the girl involuntarily noted the clock on the corner. It lacked fifteen minutes of ten o'clock. Thoroughly angered at herself for having given up so easily, she turned to re-enter the store and see the superintendent, but again the secret dread overcame her and caused her to temporize.

"I'll find a nice place to stay first," she decided, and started back toward her room.

A moment later she stopped before the window of a great millinery shop and gazed fascinated for some time at the wonderful creations inside. She could not help reveling in the thought of being able to try them on, and for a moment this natural feminine longing overcame her usual prudence. Opening her hand-bag she took out the roll of bills inside and counted them over slowly.

"Not until I get a position. What a goose I am to think of such a thing, now!" she murmured, decisively, thrusting them back into the bag.

The eyes of a small, thin-faced man standing near, who had been covertly watching her for several minutes, lit up greedily as he noted this action. As she turned and walked slowly down the street he fell in behind her with a leisurely stride.

Tired at last of buffeting the crowds on the main thoroughfares, and remembering that she had not yet had breakfast, Hazel turned her steps toward the little cafe where she had been the night before. Before entering she stopped for a moment, and, hardly knowing what instinct prompted her, opened her purse and felt inside of it for the roll of greenbacks which represented her small fortune.

It was gone! She looked down in horror. Only a little loose change remained. A burning, choking sensation gathered in her throat. She wanted to cry out. She felt faint. Groping at the door for support she sobbed, "I've been robbed! Oh what shall I do?"

Dazed and unconscious of those around her, she made her way to the corner and stood for a moment leaning against a trolley pole, trying vainly to collect her thoughts. One thing only she realized—she had barely enough money left to keep her that one day. She must find something to do and at once. With this realization her courage returned, and she set out once more, resolutely, for the shopping district.

At every place she applied she was either denied an audience with those whom she sought, on stating her purpose, or brusquely told that her lack of experience rendered her unfit for the desired place.

Becoming discouraged after many of these rebuffs, Hazel wandered for a long time, neither knowing nor caring where she went. Feeling faint and weak from hunger, she at last paused before a large but plain restaurant on one of the quieter streets in the wholesale district, and stood for a moment debating whether she should spend a portion of her remaining change for a small lunch. Glancing in the window her eye was caught by a small card bearing the inscription, "Waitress Wanted."

Hazel did not hesitate this time, but walked directly up to the counter and asked the girl behind the cash register if there was a position open there for a waitress.

"I dunno. Have to see Mr. Johnson, he's the manager." She indicated a short, fleshy-faced man who formed the center of a chattering group of young women all wearing white aprons of the same pattern.

The cashier called him by name and waved her hand toward the waiting girl. He came forward a minute later and looked Hazel over quizzically from head to foot before replying to her inquiry.

"Where you been working?" he asked abruptly.

"I've never worked like this before, but I know I could soon learn and I just must——" she broke off with a catch in her voice.

"You couldn't never juggle crockery here with the rush we have at lunch

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time." He looked at her with an expression akin to sympathy, then added, "Up against it?"

In a burst of confidence Hazel told him of her experience of the morning.

"Tough, tough, I call that, kiddo!" he murmured when she had finished, then added reflectively, "Tell you what you might do, though. If you think you can stand it in the pantry washing silverware and glasses at four dollars per and your meals, you can work there and learn to wait on the tables during the slack hours in the afternoons."

Hazel thanked him and accepted his offer with a feeling of relief.

"When will you want me to start?" she asked.

"You can commence now," he told her, and led the way to the rear, where he placed her in charge of an old woman with a generous form and a pronounced Swedish accent.

Hazel soon found that her duties were not irksome, and passed the time pleasantly in making friends of her new associates. At eight o'clock one of the girls came to tell her that it was time to go home.

The manager called her to the desk as she passed out and asked solicitously if she needed any money. He noted her embarrassment and silently handed her a dollar from the cash register without further questioning. Hazel thanked him and hurried away. She was anxious to report her first day's experience in the city to her friend the big, kind policeman. She asked one of the girls to direct her to the corner, which she had thoughtfully noted down. The girl looked at her suspiciously when she mentioned the address; but directed her to a car.

For a long time she waited on the corner where she had promised to meet him, but no policeman came. At length she gave it up and started back to the hotel. As she turned the corner her eye caught sight of the familiar blue coming toward her. Eagerly she returned to meet the officer, when a glint of light falling across his face showed her it was a stranger. He came on and would have passed her, but with sudden decision the girl stopped him and asked if he could tell her when the other officer would be on duty.

"I guess you mean Thompson?" he said, considering her description. "He goes off at seven, and—then he's been transferred. He won't be on this beat any more. Anything I can do for you?"

He leered at her through half-closed eyes and moved a step nearer. Hazel shrank away from him and noted for the first time the sinister look on his evil face. He was a much younger man than the officer whom she had met the day before, and the girl was conscious of a distinct feeling of fear and repulsion, as his bold insolent stare traveled over her figure approvingly and his dark, handsome face relaxed in an insinuating smile.

"No-o ,thank you," she replied. "I had hoped to meet him this evening, but I was detained."

"Well, can't you see me just as well," he asked. "I get off at ten o'clock, and——"

The girl drew herself up haughtily, and giving him a look of loathing and contempt, turned away from him. He seized her arm and thrust her gently but firmly back into a dark doorway and spoke angrily.

"Now see here, Lizzie, don't be giving me any of your airs. I'm on to you all right, and if you don't come clean with me I'll put a crimp in your game, on my beat. See? You just be on the level with me, and you'll find that I am about as square as any copper you ever met. Show me that you're a good fellow, and I'll see that things come soft for you around here. Ask any of the girls on my beat, and they will tell you that Dick Sully is on the square."

He paused and regarded her sententiously in the glare of a street lamp for a moment, then added, "How about it little un' are we going to be friends?"

Hazel stared fascinated into his bold dark eyes for a fleeting instant, then, with a stifled shriek, broke from his grasp and fled in terror. He looked after her until she had vanished around a corner, then laughed raucously as he turned and entered a nearby saloon.

"Old Bill Thompson, the prude, to cop a swell little dame like that! What a story for the boys at the station, ha, ha, ha!" he laughed.

Hastily mounting the stairs to her room, Hazel locked the door and threw herself on the bed softly. Inexperienced as she was, she could not mistake the meaning of his words and manner. Her cheeks burned scarlet as his evil, leering face rose in the darkness to torment her—to think that she had been treated as a woman of the streets, and this by one to whom she would instinctively have turned for help or protection!

"Surely the other one was not like that," she thought, as she remembered his words of warning. Still she was glad that he had not come.

"I don't believe I can trust any one in this cruel, wicked city," she sobbed to her own disheveled image, which gazed back at her from the cracked mirror on the wall.

At length she went down and sought the old hag who conducted the hotel, finding her in the room on the second floor which served as an office. The old woman looked up as she entered, then gave a longing look at a number of bills she held in her hand, but the remembrance of Big Bill Thompson's warning had its effect. She stood up and extended several of the bills toward the girl.

"Here's your change out of the bill you gave me last night. I took out for your room again tonight, so that only leaves nine dollars."

Hazel remembered her reckless and unbusinesslike action of the night before with a distinct shock, as she replied, "Oh, I'm so glad. I had forgotten all about it, and I need the money so badly, too."

A sharp spasm of pain contracted the old hag's features, and she hissed to herself, "Fool! I might as well have kept it!"

Hazel took the money and returned to her room in rising spirits. She was soon asleep, for she had learned that her duties in the new position would begin at seven o'clock the following day.

CHAPTER III.

Next morning, when she arose, the lethargy of newborn summer weighted her. The single window, with its coarse, dirty curtain waving in the slight breeze, revealed an early-morning sun which beat white-hot upon the tin roofs and dull brick walls of the buildings which backed up against her window.

Making a hasty toilet and pinning on her hat, she ran down the stairs two steps at a jump, and managed to catch a cross-town car that brought her to the

"How about it, little 'un?"

Quick Service Lunch Room a full ten minutes before time to begin.

The first day's work proved more tiring than she had anticipated, and she heaved a sigh of relief when at last she hung up her apron and realized that she was free for the night. On finding that she was allowed two hours off each morning, she had gone with one of the girls from the lunch counter and rented a clean little room in a flat a few blocks from the lunchroom; so she went at once to the dingy hotel and had her baggage moved to the new address.

A week later Hazel was called in by the manager who assigned her to certain tables, and informed her that her pay would be raised to six dollars a week. She entered upon her new duties confidently, but by one o'clock, when the frenzied midday appetite had been appeased and the noon rush began to subside, she felt ready to drop from sheer exhaustion. Gathering up an armful of dishes, she swayed unsteadily for a moment, and leaned against the table for support.

An elderly business man looked up hurriedly from his dessert, and noting the pallor on her face asked solicitously if she were ill. Hazel murmured an inaudible reply and hurried toward the kitchen.

A few minutes later a young man entered the Quick Service Lunch Room, and seating himself at the place just vacated by the gray-haired man, drew some letters from his pocket and began hastily scribbling on the backs of the envelopes.

Hazel placed a two-pound tumbler of water and a half-ounce pat of butter before him, and leaned lightly against the table awaiting his order. She noticed idly that one of the envelopes turned face upward was addressed to "Mr. Daniel M. Mitchell."

The young man reached absently for the menu, and after regarding it at some length, gathered up his papers and placed them carefully in an inside pocket.

"Ham and eggs," he announced finally, looking up at her.

Their eyes met. He smiled, showing a double row of milk-white teeth, then suddenly became serious.

"Why, what's the matter, kiddo? You look like you'd seen a ghost. Not sick are you?"

Hazel blushed and dropped her gaze before the scrutiny of his keen gray eyes.

"No, Mr. Mitchell, I'm not ill! it's just the heat I guess," she answered in confusion.

He gave a short whistle. "Say, I like that! Mr. Mitchell! Who's been tipping me off around here, I'd like to know?"

Hazel blushed again more vividly than before.

"Oh, I just let that slip—accidentally," she stammered. "I must have noticed it on one of your letters."

The young man smiled, apparently satisfied.

"Well, I don't object. You might even let your own monicker slip that way—accidentally, and see if I care." He laughed mockingly. "Anyhow, you can serve my ham and eggs every day in the week after this."

The girl smiled shyly, and gathering up a pyramid of dishes hastened to the rear. Mitchell finished his lunch, and after waiting a few minutes in the hope that he might see her again, picked up his check and sauntered out.

"Some little queen," he remarked with a backward glance.

Hazel watched her corner furtively until he had gone, then suddenly became aware that some one had come in and taken a seat at one of her tables. She hurried to the front, and placing knife, fork and spoon in a row before the newcomer, like three badly matched soldiers, deftly picked up the menu from between the vinegar cruet and sugar bowl, handed it to him, then stepped back and surveyed the young man more critically.

Percival Compton was indeed a good-looking youth, and his good appearance was rather accentuated by the air of quiet refinement which attached even to the clothes he wore. His shirt was of silk, soft and cobweb fine; the summer suit of silvery gray acquiesced with every movement of his slender figure with a peculiar grace of its own. His face, though a trifle pale, showed no trace of intemperate living. Hazel noted the well-formed and wavy light brown hair brushed negligently back from his high smooth forehead, as he raised a pair of laughing blue eyes to hers.

He ordered with careful precision and a languid grace which marked him as one apart from the hurrying, sweating horde which had infested the Quick Service Lunch Room an hour earlier. Hazel took the order and hurried toward the kitchen. A queer flutter of excitement in her throat almost choked her as she gave the order to the chef.

A few minutes later, as she passed two of the other girls, she noticed that they were casting surreptitious glances at the newcomer, and stopped a moment to overhear their remarks.

"It's little Perce, all right, and say, girlie, he's some swell kid. Why, I knew a girl that used to go with him, and, believe me, he suttinly knows how to treat a lady. Automobiles, and theayters, an, swell dinners downtown, an' her just a common workin' girl like you an' me——" Mayme stopped to let this impressive fact sink into the minds of her eager hearers, then resumed, "And he's a perfec' gent'mun, too. Why, he wouldn't even let her——"

The remainder of her remark was drowned by the strident voice of the chef calling an order. Hazel hurried to the kitchen and carried the young man's order out to him with renewed interest.

She busied herself with another customer for several minutes, then returned to clear off the table where he sat. As she leaned over to collect the dishes, the young man placed a bright silver coin on the cloth and shoved it toward her. Hazel drew back abruptly. A bright red spot flamed in each cheek.

"Why, what's that for?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"Well! Oh, that's just a little compliment to the excellent service," he laughed.

"But really I can't take money that I haven't earned," said Hazel, pushing the coin back to his side of the table.

Compton looked at the girl intently for a moment, then picked up the coin and returned it to his pocket.

"Well, it's truly refreshing to meet a girl once in a while who has a little pride. You'll pardon my mistake, I know. It's usually expected of one and that's the reason——"

"Yes, I know the others do," Hazel replied unsteadily, "but I don't think I shall take money that way."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," replied the youth. "I suppose you girls are entitled to it, but I hate to see a girl sacrifice her self-respect just for a little extra spending money."

Hazel felt at ease again, and stood for several minutes chatting with the young man quite as though he were an old friend, all unconscious of the black scowl on the manager's face when he chanced to look her way.

Compton watched her narrowly as she busied herself about the table. He noted the unusual beauty of her fair young face and the clear hazel eyes which had gazed so frankly into his own; the light wavy hair brushed just a trifle too severely back, he thought, and the supple grace and abundant health which found expression in every movement of her slender, well-rounded figure.

At length he finished his lunch and lighted a cigarette as he waited for the girl to bring his check. Noticing her omission, Hazel returned to the table and laid the check beside his plate. He greeted this action with a smile and leaned slightly toward her, speaking in a low, distinct tone:

"I hope you won't think I'm one of these fresh ones, but I want to say that I haven't seen a girl I like so well as I do you for a long while. Don't you think you could take me a little bit on trust and allow me to become better acquainted? If you could spare the time some evening, I know we could go out somewhere and have an awfully jolly time, even though it might be a bit unconventional."

Hazel was in a panic of confusion. She hardly knew what to say. At length she stammered, "I—I don't know. I don't believe—I'll think about it and let you know, Mr.——"

"Compton," added the youth, quickly, handing her a card. "And would you mind telling me yours?"

Hazel gave him her name with some misgivings.

"All right; I'll drop in again and see you," he smiled again and was gone.

As Compton turned from the cashier's window to pass out the street door, Morris Johnson took one step toward him, then paused. His face was livid, the cords in his neck were swollen, and his hands twitched nervously. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but instead turned on his heel and strode back into the kitchen. He came to where Hazel was standing and essayed several times to speak, but each time his rage seemed to choke him. Hazel looked at him in surprise. At last he found his voice and spoke calmly.

"Miss Dodge, I hope you won't think I'm trying to interfere in your own private affairs, but I really have your interest at heart while you are here, and of course you don't know the ways of this town so well as I do, and I hope you won't resent it when I ask you to promise me that you will never have anything to do with that—that thing who just left your table a moment ago."

Hazel looked at him in astonishment,

(Continued on page eleven.)

MISS ADVENTURE

Or, Perils in Mexico :: *By Philip Rutherford*

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CHAPTER IV.

AT DINNER Bob noticed that some of Slaughter's calm suavity had been displaced by a partially suppressed excitement. While crossing the court to the dining-room they had met Juan and the girl, and Slaughter exchanged a few words with them. As they passed on he explained that the girl was Maria, sister of Juan. The questioning expression on Bob's face caused him to add that she was Juan's half-sister.

"Her father is a distinguished-looking man with considerable Spanish blood in his veins. He is very poor but very proud; also quite troublesome, for he thinks that because his children work here as servants he has the right to enter my house and give them orders." They met near the door the man Bob had watched in the afternoon. "That's he," Slaughter whispered. To the man he nodded, "Good evening, Pedro."

The man returned the greeting as if he were conferring a favor upon Slaughter. The mine manager laughed when they had passed into the room, but Bob thought he detected a nervous note in the laugh. A few minutes later Slaughter said without any preface:

"Mr. Hayden, something has turned up suddenly that will require my absence for some days. Under the circumstances I believe it will be best for you to examine the mine tonight. I must leave shortly after midnight."

"No bad news, I hope," Bob replied casually.

"No," Slaughter answered slowly. He added after a moment's scrutiny of Bob's face, "I suppose you know something about the situation with respect to this property—its title?" Bob nodded. "I've just heard there is a plan on foot to get it away from me. I want to go to Monterey to see the land official."

"Your British citizenship will help you," Bob replied.

"Of course," answered Slaughter.

He did not pursue the topic, and as Bob had nothing to say they completed their meal in silence. Immediately Slaughter called Juan and ordered him to prepare lanterns and have enough men remain at the mine to lower them.

"We have a hand-power hoist," he explained to Bob. "We can climb out, but I thought it would be quicker to be lowered to the bottom level and work back up."

Bob acquiesced with a nod. He was not thinking much of the mine just then, but more of Slaughter and his sudden change of plans. A few hours previous he had given quite plain evidence of a desire to detain Bob and postpone his examination of the mine. Now he seemed just as anxious to have the examination made and Bob leave Cuero.

The mouth of the mine was on a hillside about five hundred yards from the house. The main shaft was more than 250 feet deep, going down below the bottom of the canyon which separated the village site from a higher range of hills to the west. On their way down Slaughter explained that he lacked the necessary hand-tools to work properly those portions that could be worked—picks, shovels, crowbars, hand-drills, etc.

"I had thought," he said, "that it might be best to confine our expenditures to these things for the present; at least until there is a more stable government."

"Are your people infected with the revolutionary virus?" Bob asked.

"Every one in Mexico seems to be," Slaughter answered, with a significant smile. "We are not as bad as some, but bad enough. I have my hands full trying to keep the Government and revolutionary leaders from knowing what sort of property I have, and trying to keep our people from taking too active a part on either side."

"Your title is good," Bob asserted.

"Very," Slaughter answered, "but how long do you suppose these people would let a crown patent from an old Spanish Emperor stand between them and a rich mine? Why, every week for a year I've been wondering if the next week some general wouldn't swoop down on me, claiming to represent a new provisional Government—whichever happened to be in the saddle—and claim the mine as the State's property."

"So that's the reason you don't think much of spending a great amount for machinery?" asked Bob.

"That's the reason I would advise caution," Slaughter answered guardedly. "But Mr. Leighton seems to have a different idea, and then—well, he has the manner.

"No!" she cried. "He shall not marry her!"

aging of the property, you know. I've already ordered some hand tools, and expect them to arrive some time within the next six days."

They had reached the bottom of the shaft and were picking their way slowly along the small tunnel that ran under the hill.

"I want to work this," Slaughter continued, pointing out a quartz vein about thirty inches thick, midway between the top and bottom, along the wall. "We have followed the edge of this vein for ninety feet. It runs something like $27 in free gold and $18 in silver. We can work that at a good profit, even with hand-power exclusively."

"That ought to pay handsomely with a steam hoist," Bob commented as he picked up a piece of quartz. "It looks good."

They discussed the formation of the ground, the timbering of the tunnels, the best machinery for the conditions, gradually working back toward the surface. The last drift into the hill was reached about twenty feet from the top of the shaft. It seemed to have been worked many years before, and to stretch for an interminable distance northward away from the village.

"That tunnel is about two miles long," Slaughter explained. "It is the old mine—the lost mine. I suppose it was cleaned out at least a hundred years ago."

They went into it a couple of hundred yards and then started back. Some fifty feet from the shaft Bob noticed a heavy oak door on the left and asked what it was.

"The opening to another shaft," Slaughter explained. "I had the door put up and locked to keep any one from taking a tumble to their death. See."

He lifted the wooden bar and pulled the door open. Their lanterns threw just enough light to reveal a deep hole across the top of which were placed heavy timbers, laid to form a bridge about three feet wide running from the door into the darkness.

"An additional precaution," Slaughter explained, tapping the timbers with his toe. "A child strayed in here one day and fell down the shaft. Then we put in those timbers and hung the door. Some of these days, when we can work openly, I'm going to pump out the shaft and explore it. I've an idea we'll find rich ore down there."

He slammed the door shut and they climbed out of the mine and met Juan, running from the house.

"Senor, senor," he called, "Pedro say he want to see you at once."

"Tell him to wait." Slaughter answered sharply. Bob saw that he was annoyed. "Don't bring such messages to me again, even if there are people foolish enough to ask you."

Juan quailed and slunk out of sight. Slaughter turned to Bob.

"I suppose you can make your estimate and report and recommendations before midnight, can't you?"

"If there is so much hurry—now," Bob replied emphasizing slightly the final word.

"Oh, only that I may get off my recommendation before I leave." Slaughter replied, his suavity having returned. "My absence may be indefinitely prolonged, and I do not like to keep Mr. Leighton waiting. Nor does he like it."

"I guess not," Bob answered laughingly. "I'll do my part in short order. It isn't much of a task."

"You may work in the office, or your room, as you prefer," Slaughter said. "Perhaps you'll be less liable to be disturbed in your own room. I'll give you a quiet one, in the rear, removed from those frequented by my people."

Bob replied in favor of the seclusion. Pedro was standing at the court entrance when they reached the house, standing stiffly erect, and consciously on his dignity. Slaughter led Bob across the court, past the fountain, to a room in the northeast corner.

"Is he always so stuck up?" Bob asked, perking his finger over his shoulder towards Pedro.

"Not always and not quite," Slaughter replied, with a little laugh. "He wants money tonight, and he is always on his dignity when he wants money."

"He works for you then?"

"Oh, I should say not. Catch him working for any one. He just wants to collect the wages due Juan and Maria."

Bob felt that Slaughter did not care to discuss the subject and asked no more questions. He was left alone shortly, Slaughter promising to send Juan at once with his bag, paper, and writing materials. Bob utilized the delay in examining his room and the outlook. There were two windows. The bars were gone from one—it being the only window in the place, opening upon the outside, which was without bars, so far as Bob could remember. This fact caused him to investigate closer, and he found evidence that the bars had been forcibly removed.

"Probably somebody was imprisoned here once, and escaped that way," he remarked.

The outlook was pleasing. The moon had risen, and lighted the tops of the range of hills, the hollows and valleys showing darker because of the contrast. To the left were the twinkling, flickering lights of the village. Bob thought it a peaceful-appearing place, too peaceful and quiet indeed to harbor any mysterious plans and plots. Yet he could not shake off the feeling that he was in the midst of mystery. The arrival of Juan interrupted his meditations.

"Your father seems a little bit put out over something," Bob remarked casually.

"My father!" The man stared at him.

"Yes," Bob replied, "Pedro."

"Oh, him!" Juan seemed relieved. "Anything else, senor?" he asked quickly. "Water? Another lamp?"

He was backing toward the door as he spoke. For a moment Bob was tempted to question him further, but decided to wait for developments along other lines. He replied in the negative and Juan left.

"So," thought Bob, "Pedro is not Juan's father. Why should Slaughter tell me that lie?"

He shook his head and began work on his report. It was, as he had told Slaughter, a very simple matter, and in an hour it was completed, recommending a steam hoist, and estimating the cost of purchasing and putting it in place at approximately $12,000, and venturing the opinion that it would increase the output of the mine by at least six-fold. Later, he added, it probably would be economical to substitute small dump cars and a track for wheelbarrows in the mine.

The task completed, Bob felt quite wakeful and averse to retiring. He sought Slaughter, found him busy at his desk, delivered the report, discussed it a few moments, and then yawned.

"I'll bid you good night, if you wish to retire Mr. Hayden," Slaughter said, rising and extending his hand to Bob. "And good-by, also, since it is quite likely I shall be off before you are up in the morning. Juan will be here and will look after your wants, and see that you get to Vista in time to catch the evening northbound train."

Bob resented the summary manner of his dismissal, but concealed his feeling behind a smile.

"Perhaps it will be our mutual pleasure to meet again," he said, as he shook Slaughter's hand.

"Perhaps," Slaughter answered inattentively.

Bob told him good-by, went into the court, stood a moment, then passed outside. He walked around the house, pausing a moment beside the window of the office, and whistled a few bars of a popular song. He continued his whistling as he re-entered the courtyard and crossed it to his room, slamming and latching the door behind him.

Five minutes later Mr. Bob Hayden climbed through the unbarred window and quietly made his way toward the window of the office. Ten feet away he stopped and pressed against the wall. The voices of three men came to him from the room. One he recognized as Slaughter's, but he spoke so low Bob could not catch the words. Slowly he crept along the wall until his ear was at the window frame.

"I tell you I know," Pedro was saying sharply. "Ramos Manuel will be here any day—perhaps tonight."

"I think you are mistaken, General," Slaughter answered deferentially. "I have had no word."

"No," Pedro replied curtly, "I am not mistaken. Manuel is due here now. He has defeated us badly the last month, but his supplies are giving out. He must have more. He thinks if he can get here he can secure them, because we shall not be watching this section."

"There are none here," Slaughter answered. "They have not arrived yet."

"Manuel does not know that," retorted Pedro. "It will be a most excellent opportunity for us, for you and me to perform a great feat. We will capture him and break the revolution. We will be acclaimed heroes. The Government then can refuse us nothing. I shall have—I shall be made commander-in-chief of the army. You——"

"I'll get a Government deed to all the Manuel estates," Slaughter said greedily.

"But you must hurry," Pedro rejoined. "If you ride all night and all tomorrow you can reach General Rio. Take this note. He will let you have a hundred soldiers. That will be enough. Manuel will not dare come with more than ten men. You should be back in—well, say in five days. If Manuel arrives before then I shall detain him by some trick. Juan will help me."

"Si, senor," Juan replied humbly.

"Hurry then," the General ordered. "Hurry, Mr. Slaughter. If he escapes us this time, I am afraid I can protect you no longer."

"I'll go at once," Slaughter replied.

Bob Hayden, stunned momentarily by the revelations, was aroused to immediate action when he heard them pushing their chairs back from the table. He ran quietly back around the house and then started toward the railroad tracks. Arrived there he hunted for the velocipede and was soon working his way rapidly towards Vista. Two hours later he aroused the lazy agent and ordered him to send a telegram at once. The man wanted to object, but Bob drew his revolver and repeated the order. Whereupon the agent "allowed" that he would send the message—at double regular rates.

Bob puzzled some minutes over the wording of the message. He thought at first to speak plainly, but recalled that there might be a leak, and changed his plan. Finally he wrote two messages, one for Leighton and one for The Girl. To Leighton he wired:

"Slaughter shipment. There is a trait here or I stay."

To Mary he sent this message:

"Judas never was a mine manager. He might have been."

Bob stood at the man's side until he had sent both messages. He ordered them repeated back for possible errors. Then he gave the man an extra dollar and thanked him. He worked the levers of the velocipede at a slow rate as he returned to Cuero.

"I guess The Girl is bright enough to decipher that message," he said to himself, "especially with the help of the one to the old man."

CHAPTER V.

Slaughter had gone when Bob awakened, having left a note apologizing for his rudeness and wishing Bob a pleasant journey back to New York. Juan handed Bob the note with the statement that he would be ready to take Bob to Vista immediately after breakfast. He seemed greatly taken aback when Hayden replied that he would not go that day, but had decided to remain and look the country over.

"But Senor Slaughter told me," Juan began.

"Senor Slaughter does not decide my movements, Juan," Bob interrupted softly. "Where is your father?"

"My father?" The man seemed puzzled.

"Yes, Pedro."

"Oh, him! He's around somewhere."

Bob caught Juan's wrist and looked intently into his eyes.

"See here, Juan," he said sharply. "Who is this Pedro—since it seems he is not your father?"

"Oh, he is Maria's father," Juan answered, grinning and smirking. "Maria is my half-sister, you know. That's why I don't understand when you say my father. I never think of him as my father."

"Is he a herder or a miner?" Bob asked abruptly, still holding the man's wrist.

"He is neither," Juan answered proudly. "He is a what you call a gentleman."

"I see." Bob chuckled. "He doesn't do any work then?"

He smiled as he added, "I don't suppose you people call it working to be a soldier. Pedro carries himself like a soldier."

"He is—he has been a soldier," Juan answered in confusion.

Bob laughed, released Juan's wrist, and told him not to bother about waiting on him.

"I can look after myself, Juan," said Bob. "I'll just wander about the place."

And though Juan very evidently was displeased he said nothing more.

There followed five days of idleness that were quite trying. Bob was again waiting for something to happen, and having a warning as to what the something would be, he was all the more impatient. He saw Pedro occasionally, though the man remained in his room most of the day. Bob knew he was up most of the night; on two occasions he had heard the man leave the house after eleven o'clock. When Bob was present at the meeting of Pedro and Juan he noticed that Juan treated the other as he might a stepfather. Twice, however, he had observed them when his own presence was unknown to them, and had been impressed with the marked deference and respect shown by Juan. Which merely increased his conviction that the story of their relationship was a lie, told to deceive him.

So Bob turned to Maria, hoping to get some more light from her. The girl seemed a sort of superior house servant, more in fact a housekeeper than a servant, even Juan taking orders from her. He was reading in the office the morning of the third day, when Maria entered to clean the room. As Bob watched her furtively, admiring her prettiness, he began to wonder how she could be so different in every way from Juan, if they were related. She was so much quicker in movement and thought, apparently so much brighter. Presently, feeling that she was being observed closely, she stopped her work and looked frankly at Bob, her dark eyes sparkling.

"How long have you been with Senor Slaughter?" Bob asked, in response to the query of her eyes.

"A year and a little more," Maria replied.

"Only so long? I thought you had been with him for many years."

"I am with—with the Manuels for many years," she answered, "with Senorita Inez."

Bob was startled at the sudden flash of hatred that passed over her face.

"She is very beautiful," he ventured, and the shot brought another look of hate into her eyes. "Senor Slaughter thinks so, does he not?"

"Si!" She almost hissed the word.

"They will marry?" Bob asked quietly.

"No," she cried. "He shall not marry her."

So that was the situation, Bob thought. Marie was in love with her master, and loved him so much she hated Inez. It added another complication to a problem that was becoming more and more difficult of solution with each new development.

"He does not love her then," Bob asserted. "Perhaps—perhaps he loves another."

Her dark cheeks grew darker as the tattling flush went to them.

"You have seen her?" Maria said quickly. "Senorita Inez? Did she speak of him? Does she—does she love him?"

"You don't want her to." Bob spoke slowly, looking direct into the girl's eyes. "You think she shouldn't?"

"She has no right," Maria answered in quick breaths. "He has no right to love her. He is—is——"

The sentence trailed off into silence. Bob understood, and instantly his sympathy went out to the girl.

"I understand, Maria," he said, softly patting her hand. She gave him a startled look, but the kindliness showing in his face relieved her fears immediately. "I understand," Bob repeated. "But you mustn't hate her. It isn't her fault, you know."

"I hate him!" she hissed, "I hate him. He is a—a devil!"

"Then Pedro is not your father," Bob said boldly. "Who is he?"

"No," the girl answered sharply. "He is not my father. He is——" she leaned nearer and whispered into Bob's ear, "he is General Pedro Morales of the Government army. He has bought Senor Slaughter, and Senor Slaughter has bought him!" A sudden realization of what she had said struck terror to her heart and she cried out, "Jesu! What have I done! What have I done!"

"It's all right, little girl," Bob replied soothingly. "I'll see that it doesn't get you into trouble. I knew that much already."

"You knew?" Her eyes opened wider. "How?"

"Oh," Bob replied lightly, "I have ways of learning things. What I didn't know was—about you and him. That's bad!"

"He deceived me," she began to defend herself.

"There, there!" Bob interrupted. "I'm not blaming you; I'm not saying you are bad. It's just a bad mess. Always is when women get mixed up in a thing. I'll help you if I can, though. Just be careful and don't let anybody see that I know or that you know I know."

Beauty in distress had always appealed to the softer side of Bob Hayden's nature. And here was a beauty, though apparently one of low degree, and she certainly was in distress. Besides, back in his consciousness, was the thought that perhaps he might be able to make good use of the girl to checkmate Slaughter's treasonable plans.

Maria grabbed his hand and kissed it several times as she impulsively thanked him. When she had left Bob sat in quiet meditation for some time, asking himself many questions.

Why was he so interested in what was going on in Cuero? What was the problem? What interest had he in whether the Government or the revolutionists succeeded? Why should he risk his liberty, or perhaps his life, by mixing up in a political intrigue complicated by a love affair? What had Senor Manuel or Inez ever done to cause him to take such an interest in their affairs? What should he do to save General Manuel, and what would be the outcome if he should save him from capture? And the only answer that came to him was the face of The Girl. She had wanted him to come.

Shortly after midnight of the fifth day Bob was awakened by a gentle scratching on his door. He lighted the candle and was about to open the door when a paper on the floor, that had been slipped under, caught his eye. It was a scrawl from Maria.

"General Ramos arrived an hour ago. Is in the office. Pedro and Juan are watching him. Courier just came from S. saying he will arrive within two days with a hundred men. Think Juan and Pedro intend to capture Gen. R. and keep him tied up till S. comes. I hate him!"

"Phew!" exclaimed Bob. "I should think she did."

He dressed hastily, crawled through the window, and slipped around the house until he could peep into the library. He saw a distinguished-looking man, dressed as a plantation owner, seated at the desk, smoking a big black cigar and thinking deeply. Presently, through the haze of smoke, Bob saw the face of Juan peering around the door jamb. Pedro, or Morales, was just behind him.

Bob placed his hands on the sill.

The servant entered in a few moments, and Manuel glanced up with a look of recognition.

"Well, Juan," he said softly," I was beginning to think the place was deserted." He glanced about. "Safe?" Juan nodded. "Where is Senor Slaughter?"

"Away," replied Juan.

"Wasn't he expecting me," Manuel demanded. "Didn't he get my message—from Inez?" Juan shook his head. "Huh! That is peculiar." He stretched his arms and legs. "I'm tired, Juan. Get me some coffee."

"Si, si," Juan answered.

General Manuel returned to his meditations. Juan walked behind him and Bob saw that he held a bag behind his back. Presently Manuel stirred.

"What are you doing, Juan?" he demanded. "Where is that coffee?"

"In a minute," Juan answered hastily.

He stepped silently nearer the unsuspecting General. As he lifted the bag to pull it over Manuel's head, Bob placed his hands on the sill to vault through the window. Just as Juan brought down the bag Bob felt two hands grab his feet, and he was pulled back with such suddenness that he flopped ignominiously upon the ground and promptly lost consciousness.

When Bob Hayden awoke he was still too dazed to know exactly what had happened. Slowly it all returned to him, however, and he laughed bitterly to think how easily he had been caught by Maria's trick. He had deliberately walked into the trap they had prepared for him. He had no way of knowing how long he had been unconscious, but a thin streak of daylight came through a crack in the shutters and he supposed it was morning. He looked about and found himself in another room, with the door securely locked and both windows heavily barred. He left the rude bed that was more like a bunk, and his feet stepped upon stone flags. It was quite evident he was in a prison room, but where?

An examination of the room convinced him that escape would not be easily accomplished. Then he sat upon the side of the bed to think. Presently his attention was caught by the muffled sound of voices. He listened at the door, but the voices were scarcely audible. He tried the windows with the same result; then each side wall. He shook his head dubiously. As he went back to the bed the voices became plainer, although he could not distinguish any of the words, nor recognize either of the voices. He looked under the bed and smiled. It was apparent then that the voices were coming up.

"I'm either on the second floor," he said, "or those people are in a basement room."

He pushed open a shutter an inch and saw that the ground was only a few feet below his window. He put his ear to the stone floor. The voices grew more distinct. He strained his ears to catch a word without success. Presently the mumble decreased, as if the speakers were moving away, and then he heard nothing. Bob waited a few minutes and began to tap gently on the flag. A hollow sound was the result.

"Dungeon or a basement," he commented. "But since they don't seem to have a cellar with this building it must be a dungeon. Perhaps that's where they have my friend General Manuel."

A few minutes later some one turned a key in the outer door and it opened. Peering through the iron bars of the inner door was the face of Juan.

"Good morning, Senor Hayden," he said with a grin. "I hope you slept well."

"You'd better open that door and let me out," Bob growled.

"Sorry." Juan shook his head. "Senor Slaughter's orders are that whenever we find anybody prowling around the house we are to nab him and put him in here and keep him here till Senor Slaughter returns. He is likely to be back tonight or tomorrow, so you will not have long to wait."

"And I suppose you'll starve me in the meantime," retorted Bob. "If I had my six-shooter I'd make you grin the other way."

"Ha, ha!" Juan grimaced. "You didn't suppose we'd let you keep that, did you? No, we'll not starve you. Maria is getting ready some breakfast to bring you. I just stopped to see if you were well——"

"And happy," Bob added laughingly. He always liked to smile when things seemed going against him. "Come now, Juan," he added sternly, "you've carried this joke far enough."

"You think it a joke, eh? Tell that to Senor Slaughter."

The man grinned maliciously, slammed the door to, and turned the lock spitefully. Through the wood he called triumphantly:

"We captured another stranger last night, in the house, the office. He is safe, too, safe under lock and key."

Bob made no reply, and Juan left chuckling. After what seemed an interminable time Maria appeared, bearing a tray. She apologized for passing the dishes, one by one through the bars, explaining that she could not unlock the inner door.

"There is some nice chicken in that covered dish," she said. "You must be sure to try it. I'll be back soon to see if you want something else."

Something in her manner caused Bob to think there was a hidden meaning in the words. So, when she had closed the door he quickly uncovered the dish. An envelope rested upon the chicken. He opened it hastily, and drew out a note from Maria and a telegram.

"You were kind to me," Maria wrote, "so I'll try to be kind to you. This telegram came while no one else was around. I'll see if I can help you escape. Don't let any one see that I am your friend. They think I am true to them."

While still whistling over the note Bob opened the telegram. A glance at it startled him mightily. It had been sent from Laredo and informed him:

"Messages received. We will arrive tonight at Vista. Meet us there.

"THE GIRL."

The signature pleased him, though the contents of the telegram worried. He could not decide whether the "we" meant Mary and her father only, or whether the Manuels were also with them. If the latter, then Bob foresaw considerable trouble.

The promise of Maria to help him escape recurred and gave him some little hope.

This capital story will be continued in the next issue of the Ledger. During the coming months many great stories will appear in these columns. If you are not already a subscriber for this paper, it will repay you to send in a year's subscription. It costs you only $1.00, and you will never regret it. Let us hear from you at once.

He Saw One Joke.

One time an English journalist was visiting in Washington. He had the proverbial British obtuseness when it came to getting the point of a joke, and the newspaper men at the capital had a good deal of fun at his expense. But he was a good fellow and when he was leaving the boys gave him a dinner.

When the time for the speeches arrived the toastmaster spoke of the pleasure the Englishman's visit had given all present and the regret that all felt at his departure. In conclusion he said—without a twinkle of the eye—

"And now, it becomes my duty to see that you do not leave us without something to remember us by. In behalf of the Press Club, I now present you with this ring."

Then, leaning across the table, he struck a silver call bell that had been left between him and the latter. Everybody laughed but the latter. To everybody's surprise, he arose in his place, picked up the bell, admired it, and put it in his pocket. Then he cleared his throat, and there was silence for his speech:

"Ah—er—gentlemen, I thank you for this charming—ah—gift. I am not a public speaker, and so I'm a bit embarrassed. But—hah—ha! I know why you all laugh. Your ah—ah—chairman was just as embarrassed as I am. He gave me this pretty bell, you know—and he got confused and said it was a ring, by Jove! I must tell that when I get home!"

Too Garrulous for Him.

Two elderly chess fanatics were absorbed in a game. Both were experts and rigid followers of all the rules of the game, written and otherwise. For nearly five hours neither had spoken a word. Backward and forward, moving and countermoving, the game swung, with no perceptible advantage to either player. Finally one of the old fellows made a fatal break. Quick as a flash his opponent moved his knight into position and softly murmured, "Check!"

The other player, making no effort to conceal his displeasure, rose from the game.

"What's the matter?" demanded his friend. "Going to quit?"

"I certainly am. I'll be darned if I can play chess with a darned old chatterbox!"

WIRE AND RAIL STORIES

The SLIDE AT BONNET *By ALVAH MILTON KERR*

"Going to be a wreck!" he shouted.

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AMES BURKE, superintendent, believed that certain things were impossible, even in railroading. Among the things that Burke thought impossible were two that concern this narrative: one, that a human being could be struck by an engine running at great speed and survive the shock; the other, that the tracks of the Western Central could be profitably gotten into Low Bonnet. Nevertheless, the tracks of the Western Central were brought into Low Bonnet, and Joey Phillips was struck, or apparently so, by the great 1300 when she was going at a whipping clip, and came out of the collision with scarcely a bruise.

In the construction of the Western Central it was, of course, desirable that distance should be saved wherever possible, since it was purposed that the road should ultimately form part of a great transcontinental line. It is probable that this desire was the primary cause of Low Bonnet being left by the wayside, snugly sitting in the valley on the south side of the Peace, while the Western Central's track passed along the side of the mountain a half-mile north of the river and at an altitude some five hundred feet above Low Bonnet. The situation had not been so entirely exasperating to the citizens of Low Bonnet, but for three reasons; first, the line had originally been surveyed through Low Bonnet, and a right of way and station-site presented the company by the town; second, the company, after changing the course of the line to the north side of the river, erected a depot due north of Low Bonnet on the mountainside and platted a town about it which they named High Bonnet; third, the citizens of Low Bonnet, owing to the fact that the north shore of the Peace was very abrupt, could not construct a wagon road to the station save by going nearly a mile up the stream. To be sure, they could climb to the station on foot and by a steep path, but that was humiliating. So Low Bonnet sat, not precisely in sackcloth and ashes, but in a state approximating what the English term "blue funk."

Low Bonnet was a small town, but it boasted a newspaper, the Peace Valley Eagle, and quite naturally the Eagle screamed vehemently, pointing out that if the railroad people had constructed the track in a loop or horseshoe at the east end of the valley, the line might have been laid down through Low Bonnet in a proper and public-spirited fashion; the town council also condemned the Western Central's parsimony and arrogance in resolutions that were scorching, and Sidewell Torch, owner of the Blue Flake mine and four times president of the Low Bonnet town council, anathematized the railroad folks in terms entirely unquotable.

However, the railroad was laid and firmly fixed on the mountain slope on the north side of the Peace, and there it promised by all recognized laws of probability to remain forever—but it did not.

As a train despatcher on the Western Central, the writer was from time to time personally cognizant of tragic, unusual, and humorous happenings on the line, and heard, also, of things worth telling. But when Superintendent Burke sent for Joey Phillips, and the youth was ushered on to the "big rug" and we gazed upon him, alive and practically unhurt after he had been struck by the 1300, we thought the record had been smashed and no other story would be worth relating. However, in operating three hundred miles of mountain track there are very frequently things happening of an astounding nature.

Joey's accident had peculiar bearing on the destiny of Low Bonnet, since the oddity of the accident brought the young man to the superintendent's attention, and the High Bonnet affair might not have come off but for the fact that Joey was made operator and station-agent there.

We men of the train-sheet pricked up our ears when Burke essayed to turn the screws down on Joey. He was a resolute, clean-looking youth of about eighteen, with a particularly good brow and firm chin. He looked the superintendent square in the face.

"You sent for me?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes; sit down."

"Thank you."

Old Burke turned his keen eyes upon the youth quickly. It was rather odd to find a mountain railroad boy so polite.

"You were run over—or rather, you were struck by the engine of the Limited at the foot of Muley Pass, or somewhere down that way, I am told?"

"Yes, sir, just where the track comes down from Muley Pass into Peace Canyon."

"I understand that your folks intend to bring claim against the company for damages for injuries sustained by yourself."

Joey turned his hat about on his knee and reflected a moment. "I don't see why they should; I wasn't hurt to speak of; besides, I tried to cross in front of the engine when it was very close," he said.

Burke looked pleased, but surprised.

"Would you mind telling me fully about it? According to Engineer Parker's report it was rather extraordinary."

"Yes, it was. I hardly know why I wasn't killed. I've been learning telegraphy at Wormsley; my oldest brother is your agent there. I went over Muley Pass down to Peace Canyon fishing. I was walking along by the track at Echo Siding when the Limited came down the grade into the canyon. She had reached the foot of the grade and was running very fast. I was walking on the north side of the main track, on the south side was the switch with eight or ten flat cars standing on it. As the Limited came close, I don't know why, but I thought the cars on the siding were moving west and would run off the end of the switch and wreck the passenger. I started across the main track with the thought of jumping on the flat cars and setting the brakes, but the engine of the Limited was upon me before I could get across. I jumped, but she struck me, or something did, and I went through the air and fell about thirty feet away. The fall stunned me, but outside of that I wasn't hurt much. I went down to the Peace a half-hour afterward and caught some trout."

Burke made a memorandum note or two, and said in his quick, jerky way: "Have you any theory explanatory of why you were not killed, and why the cars on the siding seemed to be moving when they were not?"

"I've naturally thought a good deal about it," said the big boy. "It may have been some shadow thrown along the flat cars by the waving of some trees just south of them, or the running motion of the approaching Limited may have produced the impression on my mind of the motion of the flat cars. As for the fact that the engine threw me so far and yet did not kill me, that is more difficult. I suppose I jumped—the thing was done so quick I really don't know—but I suppose I jumped the way the engine was going, only a little toward the south, for I picked myself up from that side of the track about thirty feet ahead. There must be a sort of billow or wave of air gushing out ahead of the engine when it is running at high speed, and this air wave must turn off to the right and left as water would. Maybe I jumped into and with this forward bounding air wave and was really thrown off by that instead of by a blow from the engine. Anyway, the air billow may have served as a sort of cushion over the boiler-head, so that the engine struck me very slightly, if it struck me at all. There was a bruise on my right shoulder, but if it came from the engine or the fall I am not sure."

"You seem to be considerable of a thinker," observed Burke admiringly. "Have you had much schooling?"

"In the Denver grammar school and the high school, that is all."

"That's a good deal. Do you consider yourself competent to run a station?"

"I think I could manage a small one."

"I am going to make a change at High Bonnet. Would you like to go there?"

"If you would like to have me, yes."

"All right; I look for you to make something worth while of yourself."

So Joey went over to High Bonnet, and despatchers at Paley Fork, sixty miles east, "had him on the string." More than once we canvassed his explanation of his escape from the 1300, and concluded that his hypothesis was not bad. In fact, the writer, keeping his eye for years on reports of railroad accidents, has found two cases of escape almost precisely like Joey's.

Joey seemed not to have fallen into a berth at all velvety, over at High Bonnet. The people of Low Bonnet had not made life easy for the incumbent whom Joey displaced; they doubled the dose for the new man. Being incensed with the railroad company, they "took it out" on the company's represenative. He was reported to Burke several times, but the superintendent thought the incentive mainly spleen and let the complaints pass. Still, it would only have been a matter of time when "kicking" must have loosened Joey from his place but for the unexpected unification of the Bonnets.

It chanced that I was on the wire when it occurred. The time was April and the mountain avalanche was in order. Several of our trains had stuck their noses into landslides, in two cases disastrously. Afar on the white shoulders of mountains appeared dark perpendicular streaks, showing where mighty masses of softening snow had rushed downward, crumbling bowlders into gravel and crushing forests as a giant might crush a handful of matches. The streams were all swollen with rain and melted snow.

Trains had come on to our Middle Division late that day from the East End, and the Denver Express, from the West End, was an hour and thirty minutes late at Pecos, twelve miles west of High Bonnet. That was at about three o'clock P. M. on a Wednesday, my record shows. West bound freight Number 10 rolled down through Peace Canyon, and Joey reported them out of High Bonnet at one-five. He also reported that they had set twelve cars of way-freight in on Echo Siding, the engine of Number 10 having become disabled and incapable of holding a full train on the steep grade.

The rear brakeman on Number 10 was the man who committed the unpardonable sin; he failed to close the switch at Echo Siding. He must have been drinking, for surely not more than one or two brakes on the twelve cars left on the Siding were set, otherwise the cars would not have been blown out on the main line. As it was, a strong wind, sucking down through the canyon from Muley Pass, moved the twelve loaded box cars out on the main track, and they started for Arizona.

High Bonnet was eighteen miles west of Echo Siding. Six miles west of the Siding the Peace River plunged down a twisting stair of stone called Satan's Slide, and to compass the difficult curve at this point the rails passed through a considerable tunnel. At the west mouth of the tunnel stood a sheet-iron hut, the station of a track-walker named Dillon, who, knowing something of the Morse code, had been furnished with a telegraph instrument.

Leaving the Siding at a slow pace, the twelve cars quickened their speed as the grade increased, and they came through the tunnel with a roar like thunder. The walker was nearly a mile west and he thought the whole roof of the great bore had tumbled in. He started for the tunnel on a run, and came near being hit by the string of mad things that in a few moments met him. Tumbling off the track, he watched the twelve reeling cars disappear down the curving groove in a tumult of noise; then he made for the tunnel. The runaway had about eleven miles to go to make High Bonnet. Five miles below High Bonnet the Denver Express was coming up the grade, but the track was spongy from the rains, and the coming rather slow. None the less, the runaway was going down to meet her at appalling speed. Dillon made a good run to the little sheet-iron hut, but the way was up grade and he fell into the house like a drunken man.

"S-k, S-k, S-k," he called, and sitting at the despatcher's table over in Paley Fork, I heard him.

"I, I, S-k," I rapped on the brass.

"String of cars just went down the mountains, going like a snowslide," he said.

A thrill went over me like a gush of fire. "How many cars?" I asked.

"Couldn't count 'em, 'bout a dozen, I guess."

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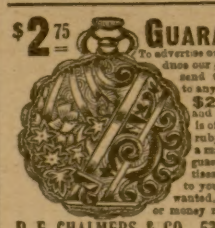

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I held the circuit-breaker open a moment trying to get my senses together. "Must be the twelve cars that Number 10 threw in on Echo Siding," I thought.

I began to call Joey at High Bonnet with all my might. "H-b, H-b, H-b, H-b!" the dots and dashes zipped, but no reply came back. "H-b, H-b H-b, H-b!" and still there was silence. Perspiration began to trickle down my face. A fancy that curdled by blood swayed before me. I saw the twelve flying cars go through High Bonnet, and a half-mile below the station strike the Express and break it in pieces. The lives—the lives that there would find a bloody close! In my heart for a little space was a frightful anger with Joey, then unconsciously that feeling turned to prayer. Cursing is artificial, prayer is natural; in the last extreme we all pray. As I beat Joey's call on the key I involuntarily begged God to send the lad to the wire that I might tell him to throw the runaway in on the siding at High Bonnet, even though it swept the station away.

But Joey had heard Dillon wire me, and had seen the same vision of destruction for the Express that so dismayed me. He had not waited to say a word to me, but caught a switch-key from a nail in the office wall, and leaped through the window on to the platform. The cars were coming down from Echo Siding, from the same rails along which he so strangely fancied that he saw the flats moving that day when he jumped in front of the 1300. It was odd, yet doubtless only a coincidence. Dillon had been compelled to run nearly a mile to the tunnel station, and by the time he called me six or seven minutes had elapsed.

Like a hurricane the cars rushed into view.

Joey heard the runaway; down the descending groove that followed the mountain's base rolled a boiling clamor of sound. Several people were waiting on the platform for the Express.

"There is going to be a wreck—on the switch track on the north side of the station! Keep on the south side of the station or you'll be killed!" he shouted, and ran to the east end of the side track.

He hurriedly unlocked the switch and pushed the slide-rails over. Like a hurricane the twelve loaded cars rushed into view. Rocking and reeling in their swift flight, they whirled on to the side track. Joey drew back and bent halfway to the earth, his lips open and white, his eyes staring. Stretching along by the station stood five box cars and three flats. The twelve loads struck them with a mashing concussion that shook the mountain to its base. A roar as of crashing thunder echoed for miles around, the cars burst into fragments, the whole north side of the station sank in like a crushed egg-shell.

With shouts of fright and amazement the people started to run, then suddenly a far more amazing thing occurred—High Bonnet, which consisted of the station and four small houses, swept down to Low Bonnet! A part of the mountain's base, nearly a half-mile long and some four hundred feet wide, slipped down like a huge toboggan and jammed its edge solidly against the south shore of the Peace, the waters of the river being spurted up and sprayed over Low Bonnet as from a sort of gigantic hose. The two little towns were literally cemented together, and Low Bonnet at last had a depot, somewhat disfigured, and a short piece of railroad track, a good deal rumpled and out of line.

No one was injured in the landslide, the great cake of earth remaining in the main unbroken. Joey went down with it, and for the moment was stunned by the phenomenon. Then he thought of the Express. Would it plunge off the end of the rails into the abyss left by the slide? There was no means by which he could get to the north side of the great rupture. But Carl Peters, at the throttle of the Express engine, and not a half-mile from High Bonnet station, heard the jarring thunder of the slide and saw the houses and track disappearing in front of him, and shut off steam.

Burke, and several of us from the despatcher's office, went over to High Bonnet in a hurry when Joey climbed to the tunnel station and reported. We found High Bonnet and our station and tracks down at Low Bonnet, where, doubtless, they properly belonged. Inspection of the base of the slide revealed the ease with which the extraordinary thing had fallen. The rock formation ascended from the river bed upward under the mountain like the steep roof of a house; this inclined plane was soaked by the rains and the snow water seeping down the mountain, while the river had cut away the natural supports at the bottom of the incline. The earth imposed on this wet "chute" being shaken by the terrible collision at High Bonnet station, and probably loosened by blastings when the track was under construction, broke loose and all went down together. The river finally cut a way around through an old channel to the south of Low Bonnet.

Clearly the track could not be reconstructed to advantage where it formerly ran, and, besides, there was now no place for a station on the mountain's foot, so finally a horseshoe of rails was laid in Peace Canyon and the line brought down through Low Bonnet. They called the place simply Bonnet after that.

Joey's nerve had certainly produced strange results, but the Express and the lives of its passengers had been saved, that was clear, and Burke declared the lad was made of the "real stuff." As for the citizens of Bonnet, Joey was their hero; even after Blake brought him over to Paley Fork and set him at better things, the Bonnet people on several anniversaries of the great slide sent him testimonials of their remembrance and regard.

In next week's Ledger another of these remarkable railroad stories will appear. Its title is "The Lightning Stroke," and the reader will find it peculiarly dramatic and exciting. Do not miss any of the stories in this extraordinary series. They will run several weeks longer, and if you are not already a subscriber, we advise you to subscribe for the Ledger at once, or order it delivered regularly to you by one of our boy agents.

* * *

THINGS TO EAT.

Parkington had forgotten entirely that he had promised to meet Gibbons for lunch, at 1:15 at Gibbons' club. Therefore, he mechanically extended a luncheon invitation to the out of town customer who had just concluded a big order in his office at twelve o'clock. Then he casually informed his stenographer as he passed out that he was stepping over to Bangs' cafe, across the street.

The customer was a large, beefy man. After considering his facial outposts for an instant Parkington ordered some raw oysters to start with, then a large steak, fried potatoes, a salad and pumpkin pie.

In the middle of the salad he was called to the telephone.

"So sorry, Mr. Parkington," said his stenographer, who was at the other end of the wire, "but I've just found that I overlooked a note I had made to remind you that you were lunching at Mr. Gibbons' club at 1:15 today!"

Parkington watched with positive dislike the manner in which the out of town customer leisurely devoured that lunch. Mournfulness settled upon his soul, for he is a light eater, and he knew that he should have to go through the motions at least with Gibbons, because Gibbons is a most important man and when he asks one to take luncheon with him it is something that as a rule one casually mentions to one's friends.

Shaking the beefy customer with acute resentment Parkington tore over to Gibbons' club.

"A nice, brisk day," said Gibbons. "Gives a man an appetite, eh, Parkington. We'll have some of the club's famous soup. And these birds with truffles are excellent. You like romaine salad, with the roquefort cheese dressing, I suppose? And some of their frozen pudding and coffee and cigars. Just a nice, plain little lunch. And we can talk about those bonds you want to sell me."

Parkington wanted to sell those bonds very much. He would have been willing to eat ground glass to accomplish the sale. Ground glass would have been preferable, because it would have taken up less room than did his portion of the delectable luncheon that he shared with his host. Grimly he opened his jaws and inserted food, grimly he ground his teeth together and swallowed the food in the course of time.

When he escaped from Gibbons Parkington had reached the state where he could have written a long and adjective-filled essay on the futility and absurdity of food. He never again wanted to see anything to eat. He was convinced that he had had enough food to carry him through whatever span of years remained to him.

As he rounded the corner he was greeted with a shriek of joy by three girls. One of them was from Parkington's point of view the only girl in the world, and the other two were just Parkington's sister and another girl who didn't count.

"Oh, Billy!" cried his sister. "I'm so glad we met you! We've been shopping all day and are tired to death and had a horrid luncheon, and won't you please take us to tea at Bowers' new place? They say it is nice. That's a dear!"

"Delighted," said Parkington. He was looking at the only girl when he spoke. It seemed to him, in his state of mind, after he had his charges seated at Bowers', that it was amazing what an appetite even the only girl could have. It was natural for one's sister and her friend who didn't count to order sandwiches apparently by the dozen, but he was pained and grieved to see that Muriel was not far behind.

"You are not eating, Billy," Muriel said reproachfully. "Here—I'll pick out the very nicest sandwich of each kind for you—how many kinds are there—five? And you must have another cup of tea! Taste these almonds——"

"And the preserved stuff is fine!" added Parkington's sister, serving him with a generous spoonful.

"You must eat to please me," begged Muriel. "You work too hard, and I don't like to see you look so pale!"

Parkington fled at the close of the tea party, and as he fled he hated the world more than ever. Once he crossed the street to avoid walking by a restaurant with things to eat in its window. His head ached, and he made a bet with himself that he could pass himself off as a stuffed animal at any museum without the slighest trouble. Feeling worse every instant, he gave up the idea of the office and went home.

As he stepped inside the hall his mother leaned over the banisters.

"Oh, Billy!" she said. "I'm glad you came early so you won't have to hurry about dressing! Mrs. Binks telephoned an hour ago—said she couldn't find you at your office—to ask if you would fill in at one of her big dinner parties tonight. Some man has been called out of town suddenly. Of course, it being Mrs. Binks, I told her you would be delighted. You know she gives such wonderful affairs.

"Now, Billy Parkington, whatever in the world should make you glare at me like that?"

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A Scarlet Message

Or, THE BROKEN SHUTTER By Leonard Jerome

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CHAPTER XIII.

LAUNCHING A THUNDERBOLT.

PURPOSELY the two men had seated themselves where they would not be seen by any one entering the room, at least until he had come fully inside. Then, too, Leonard had noticed that there was a looking-glass just opposite, and so conveniently arranged that the detective could see what passed back of him by merely peeping out of the corner of his eyes.

If the other guest proved to be the man whom they expected, doubtless he must be more or less shocked at discovering them there at the same table where he expected to sit. If he gave any indication of surprise Leonard failed to see it, though the keener eyes of the sleuth may have detected something.

The man sat down on the same side as themselves, although the landlord had jumped up to pull out a chair for him opposite. It was cleverly done. In this way they could not stare at him as they ate their meal, which would have been the case had he crossed over.

"Score one for him," thought Leonard, who was gradually acquiring quite a fair degree of sagacity in connection with these matters, and learning all the while.

The landlord, as was the custom, immediately introduced the three men. Mr. Marmaduke bowed his head, and said he was pleased to meet the others.

For the life of him Leonard could not wholly repress a little start as his gaze met a pair of sparkling black eyes. He remembered that the pretended peddler had just such glittering orbs, though at the time he had paid little attention to them, being too deeply interested in the movements of his new friend, and filled with forebodings as to what he was about to see inside the house of Jared Blodgett.

This, then, was the same man; there could be no doubt of it, even in the mind of a greenhorn tracker. Of course Mr. Crawley must be convinced the same way, and he wondered what the detective might do.

But Mr. Crawley just kept on eating his dinner with the air of a hungry man who appreciated good substantial food.

And there were at least two satisfied persons present, the landlord, who began to hope it had been all a mistake; and Amanda, who delighted to see her cooking appreciated so well.

Apparently, if the sleuth did have a bomb to hurl, he did not mean to take the bull by the horns until he had made sure of his meal.

Once Leonard, who chanced to be on the side toward the other guest, passed him the bread, and took advantage of the opportunity to look at him again.

He saw that the other was very dark-featured. It seemed to Leonard that there was something familiar about the outlines of that thin countenance, though he could not just then place it; and finally reached the conclusion that this came because of his having recently met the other face to face, at the time the pretended peddler was chained to the pump handle.

Ha! That caused him to remember something, and he allowed his eyes to fall upon the hands of the other.

They were long, and rather out of the common in shape, so that Leonard could easily believe them capable of being doubled up into an exceedingly small compass. And there was a scratch upon the back of one, which may have been made at the time Crawley snapped his steel bracelets hastily around those deceptive wrists. Yes, beyond any doubt this was the man!

Leonard felt his flesh creep in an uncanny way. To think that he was sitting within three feet of a mysterious man whose hand might have been the one to deal the fatal blow that took his uncle's life! An assassin!

His hand trembled as he started to eat the pudding that had been placed before him. Why, it took every bit of nerve he could summon to the fore to prevent him from springing up with a wild cry, and pointing a denouncing finger straight at the suspected party.

Some remark on the part of the detective, who understood what must be passing in his mind, served to draw his attention before any mischief had been done. So he proceeded to gulp down the last course, drink his tea, and then leave the table hastily.

He waited for some little time in the other room, wondering what could be detaining Mr. Crawley. Then, managing to peep in through the partly open door, he discovered that the detective was in conversation with the suspect!

Crawley had with some tact managed to bridge the chasm; and introduced some subject that must have appealed to the other; or else the man did not wish to draw further attention toward himself by appearing too rude.

Finally the detective came out. He saw the eagerness on the face of his young confederate, and pressed a warning finger against his lips to indicate caution.

When they had walked to the further end of the taproom Leonard could restrain himself no longer.

"Well, is it the same man, sir?" he asked, in a half-whisper.

"Unquestionably the same whom I captured while staring in at the broken shutter; and who afterwards gave me the merry ha! ha! by slipping my best pair of steel links."

"Will you arrest him right away?"

"There need be no particular hurry. In a case of this kind, where possible life and death are involved, it does not pay to be too precipitate, you know."

"Still, it would be too bad if he escaped."

"Ah! make your mind easy on that score, my young friend; he will not escape, I promise you."

"Are you any closer toward believing that he is the guilty one?"

"At least one step nearer."

"Post me, won't you?" pleaded the other.

"There he is going out the other way. Keep your eye on him, and tell me if he gives any sign of walking off. Now listen. While I sat there talking with him, just as though I really wished his opinion in a question of the day of which the papers are full, I saw him accidentally put a hand up to his face."

"Yes, but what of that, sir. Was there anything about his hand that made it look different from another, my own for instance?"

"I am not exactly positive, but I believe that I detected some discoloration under one of his finger-nails."

"What! do you mean——"

"It may be blood, and then again possibly I was mistaken. But if it is, you can see what a terribly significant fact that would prove."

The young man was thrilled by the intelligence, for it seemed to convince him beyond the shadow of a doubt that his own suspicions had had foundation in fact.

"Somehow, I do not know why it is, but there is something about his looks that worries me. It seems as if I must have known him at some time in the past; yet that is utterly improbable. The name of Sidney Marmaduke is entirely foreign to me."

"Oh, as to that, ten to one it is an assumed name. Don't even take it into consideration when trying to remember whether you have ever known the party before. What is he doing now?"

"Sitting on the front porch, and lighting a weed."

"Cigar, or cigarette?"

"The latter, which he took from a silver case."

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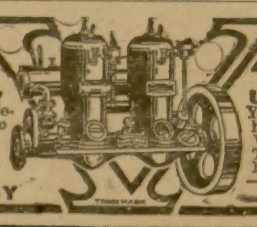

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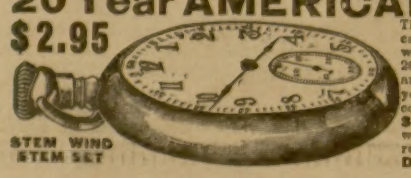

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abroad, especially in Oriental countries, he naturally falls into many of the ways of the natives; and the smoking of cigarettes is a common practice."

"There, the poise of his head somehow seems to remind me of some one. Who the dickens can it be? Queer, isn't it, how such a coincidence will annoy one? For if he has spent much time abroad, he and I never could have met, since I've not had the pleasure of a trip across the water."

The detective looked thoughtfully at his companion, as though some bright idea had come to him. Then, having reached a sudden conclusion he spoke again, saying:

"Perhaps you have never actually met the gentleman before; and he simply reminds you of another person?"

"That might be so, sir."

"Or even a photograph which you have seen. I've had just such things happen to me many times."

"If I could only remember who it was, it might help out some," remarked young Lee, with the look of perplexity deepening on his face.

"Possibly I might assist you."

Leonard looked at his companion, realizing that it was no chance remark he had just heard; and of a certainty Mr. Crawley must mean something.

"I wish you would, sir," he remarked.

"Suppose then we start close by; for these things, like charity, should begin home. Do you know what struck me—that there was a resemblance between

"Force him to accuse himself."

the head of the man calling himself Sidney Marmaduke and that of your uncle, Jared Blodgett!"

"Oh! what a startling idea!" gasped Leonard.

"And as I was told that he had a son who went abroad many years ago, might it not be just barely possible"—and he unconsciously lowered his voice to a whisper—"that this is that reprobate son, Hector Blodgett?"

CHAPTER XIV.

STEP BY STEP.

Leonard Lee stared at the detective. The idea was so vast and far-reaching that it seemed to stagger him. And yet even in that short space of time, not more than a minute, while he looked in the calm face of Mr. Crawley, doubtless many things flashed before his mind tending to substantiate the stunning fact presented by the sleuth.

"Hector—my cousin, and uncle's only son!" he muttered, as he sought to get a firmer clutch upon the startling suggestion.

"Well, he would naturally occupy that relation to you, I suppose," remarked Crawley, giving him a little time to recover his mental poise.

"You upset all my calculations, sir. Such a thought somehow never occurred to me," said Leonard.

"Still, now that I have advanced it, do you discover anything that seems to make it possible?"

Young Lee turned his head. He was looking toward the figure that could just be seen hunched in the cane chair at the further end of the hotel porch.

By degrees a light began to appear upon his face. It grew stronger, the detective noted; and from this fact he knew that the other was gradually coming to view his sudden suggestion with increasing favor.

"It might be possible now," said Leonard, in a low tone, as though talking to himself.

"Did you ever meet this Hector?"

"Only years ago when I was a small boy, sir."

"Then you would not be apt to remember much about him, I presume?"

"No, I must say I do not, only that I never liked him or he me."

"That is rather strange; for I take it that you must have been a very young chap at that time?"

"Yes, sir, I was. I used to come out occasionally to visit my uncle, then as ever since, rather a singular sort of a man, but greatly misunderstood by his neighbors."

"Hector was at home then, was he?"

"Well, no, not exactly. He had a business of some sort in the city, and stayed there pretty much of the time. But occasionally we happened to meet. He was possibly fifteen years and more older than I, a man fully grown at the time I was ten."

"Do you know what his business was?"

"Well, I would hardly like to say. I remember that uncle used to quarrel terribly with him; and once I heard him declare that if Hector kept up his associations with jockeys and gamblers he would cast him off."

"H'm! just what I might have expected. But you say the young man showed his dislike toward you?"

"Always. He was very ugly, and I avoided him all I possibly could, sir."

"Did it ever strike you why he should show this nasty spirit? You had never given him cause, had you?"

"Most positively not, sir. I made it a point to keep away from my uncle's house if I knew he was coming. But sometimes he would surprise me there. I even once got the notion into my head that he must have some means of knowing just when I left the city to visit uncle, for he began to show up regularly. And in the end, just to avoid meeting him and his scowls, I quit coming out."

"And saw very little of your uncle afterward?"

"I went to a pay boarding school, and finally as a young man started into business. Latterly I was sent for by my uncle, who began to manifest renewed interest in my fortunes. He even told me that my future would be looked after. And as I said before, on the strength of that assurance, I lately threw up my position, and was getting ready to be married."

"But Leonard, you surely must have figured out why Hector looked daggers at you in those old days?"

"Well, yes, sir, I believe I did, though as a boy I could not understand his feelings."

"You have since, of course?"

"Much better. I knew that even in those days Cousin Hector must have seen how much his father thought of me as a little boy; and was afraid that he meant to transfer his money to me, if his son continued to annoy and disgrace him by his way of living!"

"Just so. The motive, then, was plain in those days. How much stronger it would be now, since, as you tell me, your uncle had expressed just such an intention—had even assured you about the same?"

"Yes, provided Hector were living."

"Think, Leonard, do you know that he had died?"

"Uncle seemed to believe so, sir."

"Upon what do you base that assumption, may I ask?"

"He told me once that he had not heard anything from him for more than two years; and that he believed, yes, hoped, the wretched outcast had ended his career."

"Strange words for a father to give utterance to?"

"Yes, sir, that is true. But I understood. I knew that his son had given my uncle much cause for anxiety. He never took up a paper, he once said, without a cold chill passing over him."

"I suppose you mean that he feared he would see his family name in scareheads; and read of some terrible tragedy in which the wayward boy had participated?"

"Yes, sir, that is what I mean."

"And of late you have not suspected that your uncle might have heard from Hector?"

"If he did, sir, he failed to take me into his confidence."

"You knew he has been worried during the last three weeks or so—I believe you told me that much?"

"Yes, sir, but after so long a time elapsing, somehow it never occurred to me to suspect that Hector could have had anything to do with his low spirits."

"And yet I am almost positive his gloomy state of mind must have been caused by that very thing."

"Meaning that he had had word?"

"Yes, perhaps in the shape of a letter from his son, in which there may have been a threat to return home and disgrace him, unless he agreed to put up a certain big sum of money."

"That would have been enough to alarm poor uncle."

"He was not a fighting man, I imagine?"

"On the contrary a lover of peace, if let alone."

"And yet able to hold his own with grit and determination, if pushed to the wall; am I right, Leonard?"

"Sir, you could not describe my uncle better had you known him intimately in life, instead of seeing him for the first time, cold in death."

"I believe that he received such a letter about three weeks ago. He tried to keep it to himself, and then, as the time came closer, when he feared lest this son, who was a degenerate, had possibly promised to appear he could not stand the strain longer."

"And then he wrote to you to visit him, and give him advice; is that what you mean, Mr. Crawley?"

"Yes. But as I said before, his decision was taken just one day too late; for although I lost no time in complying with his request, after receiving his letter, as you know, I arrived only to stumble upon his corpse."

"Poor uncle! But Mr. Crawley, can it really be possible that this man with whom I have sat at meat is my Cousin Hector?"

"Think for yourself. He has doubtless altered tremendously since you knew him; and since you were only a lad it could hardly be expected that you would remember much about him. Tropical suns have tanned him nearly black. Other changes have appeared in his features, such as might be expected. But Leonard, a man can never alter his eyes!"

"That is true, sir."

"Look back. Do you remember what sort of eyes Hector had in those days?"

"They were dark, almost black."

"Yes."

"And used to make me shiver, I knew not why, when he looked at me."

"Because there was a devil lurking in their depths. Even at that early day this man of unbridled passion was contemplating whether at some time in the near future he might not have to put you out of the way, in order to make his heritage secure!"

"Yes, I fear that was what made him glare at me so."

"You have looked into these wonderful orbs of the man who now calls himself Sidney Marmaduke—surely you saw that they closely resembled the eyes of the pretended Syrian peddler?"

"That is positively so."

"And looking still further back, would they not remind you of those orbs which you say used to give you a cold chill when Hector turned them upon you, and either frowned, or smiled like a fiend?"

Leonard hesitated but only for a brief moment.

"It is just as you say, sir. They have the same awful something in their depths, that, as you look, seems to fascinate, appall, enthrall—a power that I have heard only hypnotists possess."

Mr. Crawley smiled as though pleased.

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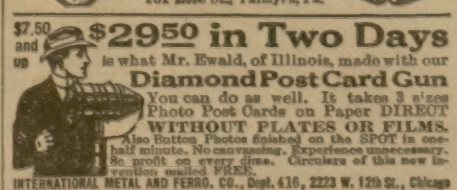

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"Well, Leonard, you have completed my case for me," he remarked, with a satisfied air.

"Then you believe it is Hector, returned from the far-away grave uncle thought he was occupying?"

"I am thoroughly convinced of the fact, and that it was his hand that committed the terrible crime of murdering his own father! Three weeks ago Jared Blodgett did receive a letter from abroad. Here is a fragment of the envelope," and he thrust a charred piece of paper in the hand of the young man.

One glance Leonard took, which sufficed to show him that it was a fragment of an envelope. He also noted that a portion of a foreign stamp adhered to one corner, and that even the postmark could be deciphered.

"Can you make out the postmark?" asked the detective, as though that were an important clew.

"I think it reads Berlin, and the date—I can just make out the letters 'ly', but the figure 27 is plain enough."

"What month ends in that way?"

"Only one, I believe, July."

"Count back. Is it not just four weeks to such a date?"

"Yes, sure enough, you are right, sir."

"Which would prove that this letter was mailed at the time in Berlin, and reached your uncle three weeks ago."

"That would be the time he first began to appear anxious. Sir, I am sure now that you have found what caused his gloomy spirits. But he evidently burned the letter. Why should he do so?"

Mr. Crawley smiled grimly. "Some one burned it, Leonard; but not your uncle," he said, with great significance.

"I do not quite get your meaning, sir."

"The desk was rummaged through and through, evidently in a search for something. If the murderer was looking for this letter, he found it; and tearing it into bits, cast them upon the dead ashes of the grate, afterward putting a match to them. They burned, all but two small pieces, which I carefully secured. They contain only a few random words, but the handwriting may prove the undoing of the assassin."

"He meant to get rid of all traces of the letter he had sent?"

"That was undoubtedly his motive. Then later he possibly tossed the envelope upon the burning heap; but it failed to burn completely up, as you see."

"But tell me, Mr. Crawley, how do you know that the letter which was mailed in Berlin four weeks ago, received by Uncle Jared in due course, and later on burned by this mysterious assassin, was written by his son?"

The detective made another little movement, and this time drew out several letters from an inner pocket.

"Please examine these. They were written by Hector years ago, before his final break with his father. Few people ever change their style of chirography to any great extent. You write today pretty much the same as you did when a half-grown lad. Is it not so?"

"I admit it. And do you mean that the fragments you picked up compare favorably with the handwriting in the letters to which Hector signs his name here?"

"I leave you to judge; for here are the two little pieces. Can you understand how to compare them, letter for letter?"

"Yes."

"And now that you have done so, what is your opinion?"

"Mr. Crawley, if I am any judge at all, the same hand penned all of them, fragments as well as letters!"

"I thought you must say that, Leonard. So you see what damning proof the attempted destruction of this particular letter, sent from Berlin, must prove against your cousin; for no one on earth but Hector Blodgett could have any interest in its disappearance!"

CHAPTER XV.

A GUILTY CONSCIENCE.

Leonard Lee seemed to be fully convinced that the keen sleuth had indeed drawn the net around the wretched assassin of his uncle in this wonderfully brief space of time. Somehow he found himself once more compelled to turn his eyes to that chair at the other end of the hotel porch where he had seen the man calling himself Sidney Marmaduke settle himself for a smoke.

"Why, he is gone, Mr. Crawley!" he exclaimed, rather startled at discovering the chair to be empty.

The detective nodded his head as though he did not share the surprise manifested by Leonard Lee.

"Yes, several minutes ago he slipped away. I do not believe he could have heard anything we have been saying over here; but you can see how he should suspect me on general principles."

"I should say so, knowing that you are a detective."

"Yes."

"And that uncle had sent for you; for I do not much doubt he has guessed that is the reason for your appearing there at the time he was peeping through the hole in the broken shutter."

"Fancy the nerve of the man sitting there at table, with first of all the cousin he had tried to implicate as the real murderer, by fashioning those letters that constituted the message on the wall; and then the detective who was endeavoring to run down the guilty person."

"I am more than amazed at it. Surely no ordinary man could have carried out his part under such conditions, sir?"

"You are right. And this fellow is no ordinary criminal. I have known him only a brief time, and yet I am ready to admit that he takes first rank with the most dangerous rascals with whom I have ever had to deal."

"But, he may escape you even now?"

"Well, hardly. In the first place, please remember that I can send a message over the wires to cover a description of him as he now appears, just as I did of the pretended Syrian peddler."

"I can understand that, sir. But undoubtedly he is beginning to get worried concerning you."

"That goes without question. Our very presence here at the inn must look curious to his guilty mind. Then, again, despite your efforts at self-control, I think he saw that you were looking at him out of the tail of your eyes. And last, but by no means least, that silly fat landlord gave the thing away."

"In what way, Mr. Crawley?"

"Why, by his very nervousness. Every time Marmaduke moved suddenly he would jump and look scared; just as though he fully expected to see the plates begin to fly through the air. I noticed that the man eyed him closely on several occasions, as though putting two and two together."

"Well, you threw it into the landlord pretty strong when you gave him to understand that his guest was in reality an escaped maniac. His idea of such things implied action, and plenty of it, when the crazy person found that the game was all up."

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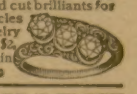

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Mr. Crawley condescended to smile again at this remark of his young assistant.

"True. But the fat is now in the fire; and since I believe I have a consistent case against the dark-featured guest of the hotel, the next thing will be to take him into custody on the serious charge of murder."

"Then probably you know where he has gone right now?"

"I have a pretty good idea, judging from certain things I heard him ask the landlord of the inn."

The detective once more drew out paper and pencil, after which he hastily scribbled several lines.

"Now it is up to you to help me materially. If I give you the word, please go to the nearest telegraph office and tell the operator you want to send another message to every point which my former one covered."

"I understand, sir. And is that the message?"

"A part of it. You can add a brief description of the motor car you will see issue from that garage across the street presently, in which our friend Sidney Marmaduke will be seated, probably alone!"

The young man started.

"Then he is really meditating flight?" he asked.

"I believe that I have him on the run. He dares not leave town in the ordinary way by train, for fear lest he may be intercepted by my orders. So he made up his mind to feel in the humor for a little observation trip around your beautiful country. I even heard him tell the landlord that he fancied the place so much he might wish to purchase a home here."

"All of which was done for the sole purpose of making his actions appear quite natural, so that you might not suspect his real motive was flight?"

"I do not question it for a moment. Perhaps he expects to make a change in his appearance at some place, and give me the slip. Later on he could write from abroad, and say that, having just heard of his father's death, he wished to put in a claim as a son."

"But there is one thing which I do not just understand, Mr. Crawley."

"Let me know what it is, and I will do my best to enlighten you, Leonard."

"Why don't you just walk up to Mr. Marmaduke, put your hand on his shoulder, and arrest him right now?"

"I surmised that would be your question. There are several reasons for not adopting those tactics."

"Yes sir, I suppose so."

"In the first place, and chief of all, don't you see that only guilt could cause a man to flee madly, if he believed himself to be pursued?"

"I suppose so. And you mean to force him virtually to accuse himself by his actions?"

"I certainly do. Then again, there may be a certain amount of sporting blood even in the veins of a detective. I am often averse to potting a rabbit save on the jump. I'm giving Hector a chance for his money. But the main thing is to make him commit himself by means of the fear that has begun to course through his veins."

"You will pursue, of course?"

"Although you did not know it, I sent a note over to the garage by the hostler after we came out. I believe a car is even now awaiting my pleasure over there, into which I can jump at a moment's warning. Ah! look, was I not right? See, that is our friend sitting in the chauffeur's seat of that machine. The last lap of the chase is even now close at hand, my friend."

The conclusion of this highly interesting story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. Read it. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year.

The Sorrows of Johnny.

Little Johnny was small of stature and looked rather pale and out of sorts, which led his schoolfellows to tease and cross-question him.

"Who's your family doctor?" asked a big boy, with a bullying and swaggering air.

"Haven't got any doctor at all," said Johnny. "I never see one."

"How jolly fine!" replied the other. "You don't have to take any medicine, then?"

"Oh, don't I?" replied Johnny. "That's all you know about it! My father's a dentist, my mother's a homeopathic, my eldest sister has joined the ambulance class, grandmother tries every patent medicine advertised, my uncle is a veterinary surgeon, and—and," he added, almost in tears, "they all practice on me!"

Dead or Alive?

Two Irishmen were working on the roof of a building one day when one made a misstep and fell to the ground. The other leaned over and called: "Are yez dead or alive, Mike?"

"Oi'm alive," said Mike, feebly.

"Sure, you're such a liar Oi don't know whether to belave yez or not."

"Well, then, Oi must be dead," said Mike, "for yez would never dare to call be a liar if Oi wor aloive."

The White Slavers.

(Continued from page three.)

"Why, Mr. Johnson, you surely don't mean the young man in the light suit?"

"Yes, that's the one I do mean. Steer clear of him—he's a——" Again losing control of himself, Johnson hurried out without waiting for the girl's reply; nor did he ever mention the subject again.

Hazel lay awake for a long time that night, going over her varied experiences of the day. She was in a maze as her thoughts recurred again and again to the handsome youth with the laughing blue eyes, which seemed to smile at her out of the darkness; then returned to the strange words of her employer. At last she resolved that she would decline the proffered invitation, and wait until she understood more of that to which the manager had referred.

She dozed by fits and starts until her alarm clock woke her, but in her troubled dreams she saw constantly the laughing blue eyes, and heard again the soft, musical voice questioning:

"Can't you take me a little bit on trust?"

This strange story leads to very extraordinary situations and dramatic episodes. The reader will find it eminently worth reading to the end. Next week's Ledger will contain further chapters of it. The surest way to get the Ledger is to subscribe for it and have it come to your home regularly. Today is a good time to attend to this.

At Sea With Napoleon.

(Continued back from page seventeen.)

plot was. Events took their allotted course in France, and the great Napoleon went into exile as unalterably as if oversanguine friends had not planned to save him by strategy.

Rodwood was not a loser in the end by the adventure. Le Corbeau was the property of himself and his crew, and she was rigged for a merchantman, and long sailed the seas. In another way the captain was a gainer, for men said that he had found a fine wife in Lucy Nelson.

The End.

Lords in the Making.

Allan Dawson, an American, says he was in London when the question of making new lords was agitating England, and that he happened to be in the press gallery of the House of Commons when the subject was under discussion.

"It was an exciting time," said Dawson. "A list of names was under consideration. I listened until the House had disposed of three and selected their titles. The first man decided upon was General Booth, of the Salvation Army. It was sent forth that his title was to be Lord Saveus. The next was Mr. Patterson, the big baggage and express man, of London, and his was to be Lord Deliverus. The third was Mr. Pink, who owns the largest jam factory in England. They fixed his title as Lord Preserveus. Then I came away."

Beggar—"Mister, can't you give me a little help? I lost my wife last week."

Mr. Henpeck—"You don't want any help—you want congratulations."

Fair to All.

"Recently," says a Richmond man, "I received an invitation to the marriage of a young colored couple formerly in my employ. I am quite sure that all persons similarly favored were left in little doubt as to the attitude of the couple. The invitation ran as follows:

"'You are invited to the marriage of Mr. Henry Clay Barker and Miss Josephine Mortimer Dixon at the house of the bride's mother. All who cannot come may send.'"

Not the Usual Way.

The monotony of life at a rural railway station was relieved the other day by an amusing incident. A dandy took his ticket at the booking office, and then surveyed the station buildings leisurely. On hearing the noise of the approaching train he made more haste than speed to the platform. A little run when nearly at the top of the stairway caused his foot to slip. His silk hat wabbled on his brow, his umbrella and bag betook themselves one to his right and one to his left, but he manfully regained his belongings in a grasp-all sort of fashion when on all fours. Then he looked meekly up at the gate official.

"Is this the way to the train?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," was the response. "You can come that way if you prefer to do so, but it looks bad."

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12 Pints Glass Stoppers	3.80
24 Pints Glass Stoppers	7.50

Guaranteed to give perfect satisfaction or money refunded.

Mind you this is a pure, Straight whiskey fully aged and mellow—a whiskey the quality of which can't be duplicated for anywhere near our prices by any firm. Take advantage of these offers as they may soon be withdrawn.

Just note these low prices.

In Full Measure Containers

1 Gallon	$1.65
2 Gallons	3.25
3 Gallons	4.85
4 Quart Bottles	1.80
8 Quart Bottles	3.55
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OSCAR BROTHERS, Dept. 1 Stock Yards Station KANSAS CITY, MO.

REFERENCES: Stock Yards Bank of Commerce and all other Banks in Kansas City.

Young Lawyer—"Perhaps I can get you off on the insanity plea. Have you any insane relatives?"

Prisoner—"Well, me father and mother retained you to defend me, didn't they?"

Mean.

"Let the people rule!" the aldermanic candidate shouted.

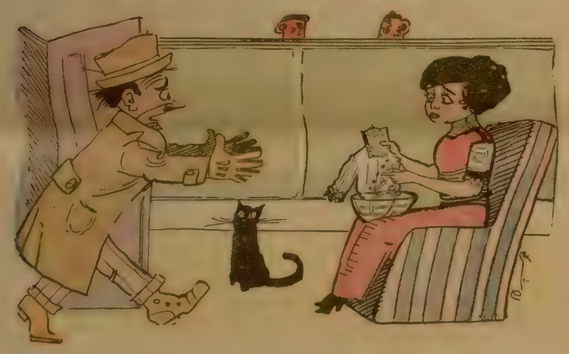
"Yes," sneered a sarcastic man in the audience. "I suppose you don't care who does the ruling so long as you can do the grafting."

Ruined by the Stage.

"The stage ruined Plunkville's best pitcher."

"How was that?"

"He was in vaudeville all winter and now he can't do a thing without a spotlight."



Mr. Worrimore—"My poor wife! How do you feel? The doctor will be here in a moment."

Mrs. Worrimore—"What are you thinking of? I telephoned you that I had broken both my collar bones and I expected you to stop on your way home and get me some more to stiffen up this embroidered collar."

All There.

"How many kinds of flowers are there in the world?"

"Really, I have no idea. Some day I'll get hold of my wife's spring hat and count 'em up."

Thoroughly New Yorkish.

New Boarder—"Seems to me this room is terribly small."

Mrs. Harlem—"You must remember, sir, that this is New York City. It isn't Texas or Philadelphia."

IN THE SPRING.

In the spring the housemaid's fancy
Lightly turns from pot and pan
To the greater necromancy
Of a young unmarried man.
You can hold her through the winter.
And she'll work around and sing,
But it's just as good as certain
She will marry in the spring.

Women and Cards.

Binks—"No use playing cards with a woman. Women haven't the first glimmer of an idea of honor—no, sir! I've tried it with my wife often."

Winks—"Eh? She doesn't cheat, does she?"

Binks—"Well, not exactly; but she might as well. You see, I put up a certain amount of pin money for her against a certain lot of garments of mine that need mending. If she wins, she's to get the pin money; and if I win, my clothes are to be mended."

Winks—"Fair enough."

Binks—"Well, every time she wins, she demands compound interest at ten per cent a minute from the time the game commenced, and when I win she sends my clothes to the tailor's."

Doubleyew—"What are you going to do when women rule?"

Ecks—"Learn dressmaking and then make 'em do as I say."

Poor Man.

We see our friend sitting with his head in his hands, moaning dismally.

"Cheer up!" we say pleasantly. "It can't be as bad as all that."

"Can't it?" he sighs. "Listen. My wife and I decided that our bills for vegetables were too high, and that we would have our own garden. She thought it would be fine for she could do some of the work in it, because she just loves to fool around plants, and besides it would be good for her health. And, furthermore, we figured that we could save at least $100 by raising our own garden things. Well, we planted the garden, and then she went to the dressmaker and had a gardening outfit made that cost her a cold $210!"

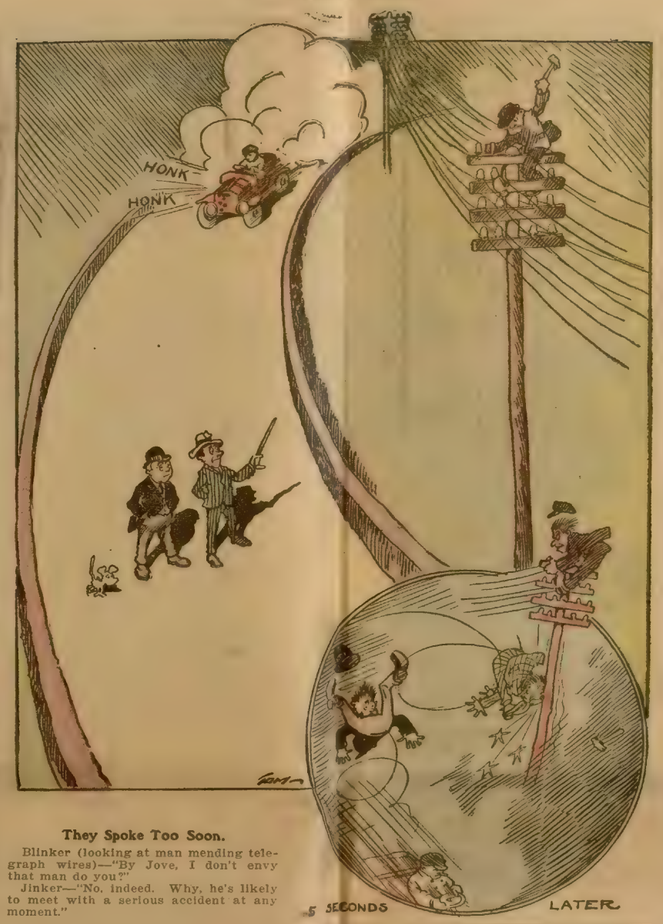
We pass on and he resumes moaning.

Coming at Any Cost.

The small daughter of a Kansas farmer, making her first visit to Kansas City, was quite carried away with the charms of city life, and she went home bent on persuading her father to move to town. But father remained firm in his decision to stay on the farm.

Finally, one day, after a long spell of dejection, she exclaimed hopefully:

"Mamma, if we ever get a divorce, we'll move to Kansas City, all right!"



They Spoke Too Soon.

Blinker (looking at man mending telegraph wires)—"By Jove, I don't envy that man do you?"

Jinker—"No, indeed. Why, he's likely to meet with a serious accident at any moment."

A Humble Beginning.

He—"I am so glad that you are willing to begin housekeeping in a simple and economical way, but are you sure you can get along without servants?"

She—"Yes, indeed; that's easily fixed. We can hire furnished apartments which have been left in charge of a housekeeper, you know; and as for the meals, we can leave our orders with a caterer."

Grocery League.

"The baseball season is drawing on."

"That's right."

"Yes; the boys around the store have begun preliminary practice."

His Rank.

Mistress—"Well, I'm sorry you want to leave me, Mary; but what's your reason?"

(Mary keeps silent.)

Mistress—"Something private?"

Mary (suddenly)—"No, mum; please, mum, he's a lance corporal."

Why Kelly Has a Black Eye.

Kelly (visiting country friend)—"An' so this is your garden. Faith, Mike, the seeds ye've planted make me think of wienerwursht an' sauerkraut."

O'Brien—"An' phy is thot now, Kelly?"

Kelly—"Because, d'ye see, they're Germanatin'."

Joe—"How are you, old man?"

Arthur—"Got a beastly cold, y' know."

Joe—"Hard luck, bah Jove! Been going out in the cold without your monocle?"

Arthur—"No. Called on Henry at his house and that wretched dog of his persisted in wagging his tail and creating a draft."

THE HOME TEAM.

Our catcher comes from Keokuk,
Our pitcher votes in Troy,
Our shortstop—ah! we played in luck
To get that Pittsburgh boy.
Our first base lives in Chicopee,
Our second base in Milwaukee,
Our third in Kalamazoo;
Our right field's married in Spokane,
Our left resides in Eastport, Me.;
Our center's from Peru.

—Life.

Always in Stock.

Professor Longhair—"I read in a newspaper that there are some remarkable specimens of petrified wood in this neighborhood. Can you tell me where they are to be found?"

Resident—"H'm! Lemme see. What is petrified wood?"

"Natural growth turned to stone."

"Hard?"

"Hard as rock?"

"Won't burn, eh?"

"That's the kind."

"Go down to the next corner, sir, and turn to your right. A little way on you'll see Catchem & Cheatem's kindling wood yard. I got a load there last week."

Footpad—"Ten dollars or your life!"

Wayfarer—"I am a poet and——"

Footpad—"Den gimme a nickel—I never overcharge nobody."

Back to the Soil.

"I s'pose you're perfectly happy, now that you are in your country home? If I remember right you always wanted to be a farmer."

"Yes, but there is such a lot of waiting about it."

"Waiting for what?"

"Why, for the handy man of the neighborhood to come around and spade up my garden."

Busily Engaged.

"So you are in favor of sending a man to Washington for only one term?"

"Well," replied Farmer Corntossel, "I dunno. I favor it, but I guess it's mighty liable to be a one term system for our representative. When you give a man strict orders to revise the tariff, fix up the currency and do whatever he kin to promote the initiative an' referendum an' woman suffrage, he ain't liable to have a whole lot o' time left to hustle around an' git re-elected."

Grocer's Prediction.

"I am going to start a garden," announced Mr. Subbubs. "A few months from now I won't be kicking about your prices."

"No," said the grocer, "you'll be wondering how I can afford to sell vegetables so cheap."

First Cook—"Have you heard from Bill since he stole that auto?"

Second Cook—"Yes. They caught him with the goods on him—upside down."

It Didn't Work.

Hubby was trying to jolly wifey along and make her forget that she wanted a spring suit.

"Now," said he, "the town committee is offering a prize for the prettiest lawn."

"What's that to me?"

"Why don't you enter the contest?"

"I haven't had a lawn in five years. I haven't even a gingham that is fit to wear."

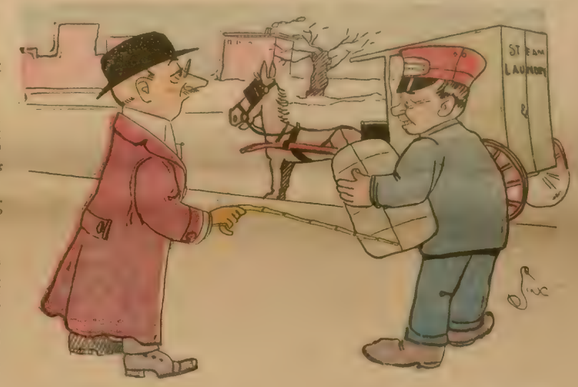
Not Convinced.

Male Guest—"You must admit one thing: Though the American women cannot vote, they are well taken care of."

Mrs. Strongmind—"They are, are they?"

Male Guest—"H'm! You never see any bent-up old women here."

Mrs. Strongmind—"No; when women become too old to be offered seats in street cars, they get straightened out hanging to straps."



Inquisito—"About how many times does a shirt usually go to the laundry?"

Laundryman—"We do up a shirt till there's nothing left but the name on the neck band."

A Rare Film.

"Madam, I understand that your daughter helps you daily with your housework."

"It is true."

"What royalties would you charge me for a moving-picture reel of this most unusual sight?"

The Usual Crop.

"John, you promised at least a dozen of our friends some early vegetables."

"I know I did. I wonder if they wouldn't compromise on a trip to the theater instead. I don't see how I am going to divide four radishes among a dozen families."

OUR MOVING PICTURE SHOW---YANKEE PRESENCE OF MIND.

"I was in the Swiss Mountains," said the truthful traveler, "when I was suddenly confronted by a highway robber."

"'Your money or your life!' cried the robber. With my usual presence of mind I said to my companion, 'You give your pocketbook first to Mr. Robber, Arthur!' whereupon

the robber turned and aimed a pistol at my friend, still keeping one aimed at me. As he did so I ran my alpenstock up his sleeve and out through the other one, and

just as my friend and I ducked our heads the robber fired.

"It was very easy after that to tie the fellow to the alpenstock,

and take him to the nearest police station!"

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At Sea With Napoleon

Or, FLIGHT UNDER FIRE

By William H. Manning

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Begun in No. 12, March 22. Subscriptions can begin with that issue, or back copies can be obtained from news stands, our agents, or by mail from the office of publication.

CHAPTER XI.

RODWOOD REBELS.

THE steward nodded confidently.

"I'm sure," he responded, "I saw them go into their room about ten o'clock, and I've sat here ever since. They certainly have not come out."

Rodwood hesitated. The room occupied by the girls was on one side of the ship and the signal light had been displayed on the other. If it could be proved that they were in their proper place they would be eliminated as the traitors.

Feeling that it was imperative he should locate the person who was betraying the course of Le Corbeau, he decided that it was a slight matter then to arouse sleeping passengers. He strode to the door and knocked.

"Who is it?" was the instant answer, and he recognized Lucy's voice.

"Captain Rodwood. May I see you for a moment?"

"Certainly. We have been expecting this."

The door opened and both girls stood before the sailor, fully dressed. Lucy smiled faintly.

"When the firing began we rose and prepared for what might happen," she explained. "Is there danger?"

In view of the fact that faithful Malachi was where he was and had already given his statement, the girls were exonerated from connection with the red signal light. His mission in that quarter was done. Not caring to enter into details then he sought for a reasonable explanation as to why he was there.

"That firing," he said, "has been so often repeated that I thought it might cause more uneasiness than is yet necessary. Permit me to say that, though we had the misfortune to pass very near some armed vessel and received her fire, there is every reason to believe the darkness will enable us to slip away from them."

"It is very kind of you to take the pains to tell us," said Lucy gratefully. "Thank you, thank you!"

Even the sharp-tempered Rhoda added her acknowledgments, but the captain did not linger. He had satisfied himself that they were innocent of the present signaling which meant that they were equally innocent of that which had been done before, as reported by Boissard.

But who, then, was the traitor in the ship who was bringing the hostile vessels to find their prey?

Having regained the deck he went to where Mate Breeze stood watching as before.

"Seen anything?" Rodwood demanded.

"No red light, and nothing else suspicious."

"Remain here a while longer and continue your work. If the light shows again use measures to learn from what part of the craft it shines."

He rejoined the Frenchmen, who remained apparently unconscious of what had happened. The skipper looked at them critically. Napoleon was there, and so were Boissard and Prevost, and he knew all had been there when he made the discovery.

Must he then, suspect one of his own crew, a party of Americans he knew thoroughly, and, to the last man, respected and had confidence in? The idea was staggering. Americans all, foes of England! Why should one of them signal to aid an English warship?

"We seem to be drawing away from the foe," said Napoleon quietly.

"She surely is no nearer, and as we have changed our course she is no longer following directly at our heels. Unless she has magic means for locating us we bid fair to shake her off wholly."

"Until morning."

"Nobody can say what the morning will show. It is our task to get as far away as possible, hoping that we shall have a vacant sea off our decks. There will be a good deal of hide-and-seek about it, though."

"Cannot we bear constantly away from yonder stranger?"

"Yes, if he continues to show his lights. But, sire, there may be other cruisers about. If he has a consort there is no knowing where that unknown quantity is."

Impressed by a new idea Rodwood left the group and spoke to some of his men. He was determined to prevent more signaling, and there was only one way to do it. He stationed sailors along the bulwarks to look over and make sure no red glow was shown there.

When he returned Napoleon was moving slowly toward the companion.

"I am going below now, monsieur," the Emperor explained. "Should there be prospect of fighting on board, pray call me. Perhaps a fallen general may even yet be able to defend himself and his friends."

He pressed Rodwood's hand and disappeared, while his fellow countrymen moved about in short pacings.

"I think, Captain," said Boissard, "that we may call the trouble past for this occasion."

"Be that as it may, my duty is cut out for me. From this time on until day dawns I am going to know everything that happens in this ship, and near it. If I am not Argus-eyed, I shall, at least, be watchful."

What he had in mind was clear to himself, but he did not see fit to explain, and perhaps the point was lost upon his companions. Boissard made a formal, complimentary answer and after a few minutes the two Frenchmen followed their illustrious countryman below.

Even before they went it was plain that the hostile vessel was shaken off for the time. She had no means of knowing where Le Corbeau was, since her deck was dark and the night so dull, and was drawing far to the west of the smaller ship.

Rodwood joined Breeze and they spoke fully of the red light, trying to account for it, but without results. In a picked crew, where they could almost risk their lives on the faithfulness of every hand, how were they to find a traitor?

The red light did not shine again, nor was the warship seen. Hour after hour the fugitive craft picked her way into the darkness, her commander often going below to study the chart.

Convinced that he ought to have a clear sea before him, he was nevertheless anxious in that respect. The course of Le Corbeau had been very devious during the chase, and a good deal of uncertainty existed.

Before morning he ventured to catch a short nap below, but when dawn arrived he was on deck again. The fog paled before the power of the distant sun, and, soon after, it was seen to be lifting. The question of what it would reveal when fully gone was momentous.

Perhaps it would be a sea free from all other sails, but it would be a matter of chance. A warship might be within a few fathoms of the imperiled fugitives.

The view widened and, at last, the sea was free from mist. Beaten upon by a bright sun it lay sparkling in the warm rays, and only one keel displaced its waters within the view of those in Le Corbeau. They had the visible space to themselves.

When breakfast was finished Rodwood called a council.

"Now," he said briskly, "it is time that you gave me my port. It is simply suicidal that we should dodge around in this region, the West Indies hard upon our beam and cruisers liable to appear at any moment. How am I to evade the enemy when I don't know where to go?"

Boissard looked at Napoleon.

"I regret," said the Emperor, "that our Council of Safety in France saw fit to lay such unalterable conditions upon us. We should have been left to our own judgment, and free to change our plan as conditions required."

"As it is," added Prevost, "we cannot do it."

"Do you mean," asked Rodwood sharply, "that you refuse my request?"

"My idea," said Boissard, "is that we should tell everything at dark tonight. It will be anticipating matters only twelve hours, and it may be ventured."

"Why not today?" cried the captain.

"This cruise of ours has wheels within wheels, many men are affected the destiny of France may be at stake, the escape of our illustrious ruler, the welfare of many other nobles and generals of France——"

"How can that be?" demanded the captain warmly. "What have the movements of a little craft in this far part of the world to do with France, or anybody but those on board? Speak, Boissard! I am weary of mystery. I demand to be free to act like a sane man, not like an idiot. Speak!"

CHAPTER XII.

FOLLY ON SHIPBOARD.

Rodwood had come to his feet and he stood towering above his companions, his face grim and full of feeling.

"Tell me," he added, "where you want

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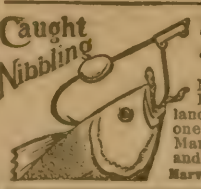

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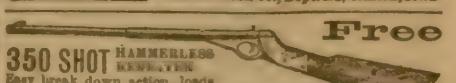

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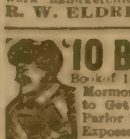

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me to go and let me go there. Speak out!"

The Frenchmen gazed at him calmly, not a stir among them showing that one of their number was moved by the intensity of their American navigator. As far as their manner indicated, he might have been speaking on some trivial subject.

"My dear fellow," said Boissard, "you are unduly agitated. Believe me, we have full confidence in your ability to evade the English foe."

"That is impossible unless a change is made. Give me my port and I'll lay my course for it and do my best to shake off pursuers. But, gentlemen, if you keep me in these much-traveled waters there will be only one chance in a hundred that I can escape the warships. What will happen if I fail through this folly?"

He paused and pointed to the man at the head of the table.

"The Emperor is here!" he added with intensity.

"But——"

It was Boissard who began, but Rodwood resumed with even greater energy.

"I am an American, and I've had no hand in the wars in Europe, but I am devoted to the French people, and when I found chance to aid their great Emperor I accepted the chance gladly. Must my sacrifice be nothing? Must I fail because you tie my hands? Name my destination, and let me leave this huddle of islands. Name it!"

Napoleon rose, and, going to the side of the American, took his hand.

"Monsieur," he said, his voice shaking, "this devotion touches me deeply. Even among my most faithful followers in my own land I could find nothing nobler, finer, more admirable. I thank you, but we are so hemmed in by earlier plans that we cannot give you the port at present."

"Do you mean that the great Emperor is subject to the vagaries of a Council of Safety?"

"The fallen have no power. The Council has. I am so subject. My dear friend, I am grieved, but we must delay a little further."

Boissard and Prevost nodded their concurrence in this declaration. Rodwood stood looking at them in amazement and consternation.

"You promised, when in France, to be subject to our will," Boissard reminded smoothly.

The American's eyes fell. He was briefly silent, and his athletic figure seemed to lose its strength and poise.

"I did so promise," he admitted, a quiver in his voice. "I will make no further argument, and try to avoid even pleas, but this I must add: To linger in these waters is madness. I had hoped to bear the Emperor to safety, but if we linger, I shall, in all probability, bear him to destruction. I leave it to you to choose!"

He saluted gravely, and soberly, and slowly left the cabin.

Reaching the deck he found conditions unchanged, but even the fresh breeze that was sifting over the rail to fan his heated face failed to restore his equilibrium. The mate was busy, and this left the captain alone. He stood gazing across the blue water with his mind in a whirl, but it gradually became more practically active.

"I don't understand!" he muttered, bringing his clinched hand down heavily upon the rail. "I don't understand. It is like murdering the Emperor. If he is so blind, why can't Boissard and Prevost see?"

His fingers now played excitedly upon the rail.

"There's something wrong, something very wrong!" he added. "What is it?"

He studied the question carefully, but failed to get light. What could be wrong when he was under the orders of Napoleon and two chosen friends? Yet, yet—the impression remained. There was something wrong!

He had just given up trying to see into the mystery when Breeze approached and asked for instructions.

"We are on a tack we took to dodge the warship," he reminded, "and I don't understand that we are compelled to hold to it. It's less risky than the one we were laying before we made the dodge, but it might be improved. We're liable to meet other ships at any time, for this is a sea pathway."

Rodwood meditated and arrived at a decision.

"We are off the course they ordered us to take," he agreed, "and until they give fresh directions our will is supreme. Bring her bows two points to port, Breeze, and we will see what that will do. We shall leave the main traveled way, and if allowed to keep it up will eventually touch the American coast well west of where we might look for trouble. Bring her to it, Breeze!"

It was done, and the skipper experienced some satisfaction for a time. Luck had given them a clear outboard, and if they were not further trammeled they would draw toward friendly waters with every sail set, which meant a good deal with Le Corbeau footing it at her best.

After a time Lucy and Rhoda came on deck. They were losing color in the voyage, but the stress of circumstances had robbed the latter of much of her temper, and both had developed a composed bravery that was becoming. They stood by the captain and watched the rolling blue of the sea until Lucy made a discovery.

"Why," she exclaimed, "we are sailing northwest. Will not that bring us to the United States?"

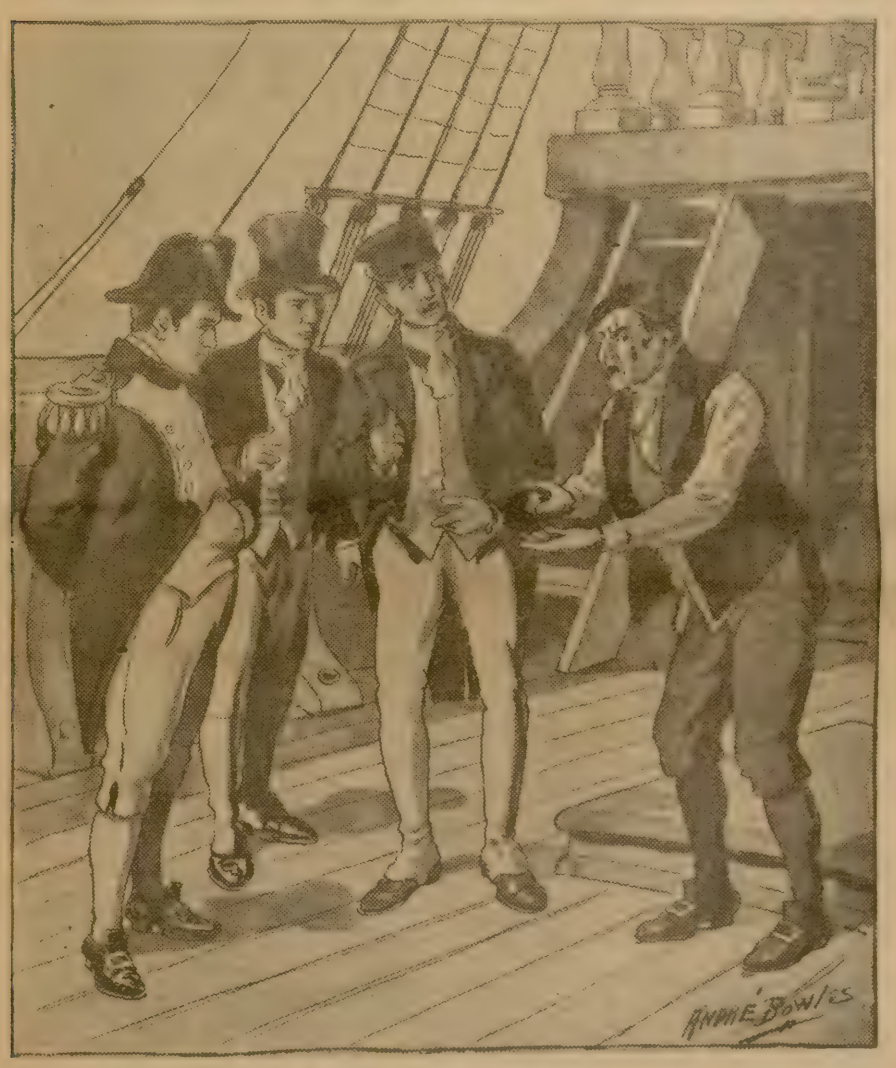
"If we are left alone, yes," Rodwood replied. "It is what I hope for, but we are under orders. I have explained that to you already. If I am commanded to shift my helm there is no knowing where we shall go."

"It is a wearisome voyage!" she sighed.

"Yes," he admitted. "Even for the forecastle hands. Nobody is here for pleasure, or if he is, he is not getting it."

"Are you still on good terms with the Frenchmen?"

"Why, yes."



"This is your doings!"

"They have, as you know, ceased to worry us as they did at the beginning, and I think even Boissard no longer has faith in the ridiculous notion that we are spies. That is something."

"Yes."

"Perhaps it is heresy, but you know I do not share your admiration for the French nation or her people individually, so I will speak out freely. I see little that is kingly in Napoleon."

"What do you mean?"

"I should find it hard to say—it is just a feeling. He seems to me very much like a common man."

"Our first impression," added Rhoda, smiling, "was that he ought to be wearing a crown, and robed in purple."

"And," supplemented Lucy, "we do not find him, in spite of his dignity, a kingly man in word or movements."

"You will remember that he is just now a fallen king. Wellington crushed him when he won Waterloo, and that is the cause, I think, of much that you notice. I have found him cool and ready."

Before more could be said Boissard came on deck and looked at the compass card.

"Not the right course, good Captain," he said. "We don't want to go to your country. You owe me no apologies for anything, for I, being much wrapped up in other thoughts, have neglected to give you your true course today. Where lie the Bahamas as we are?"

"Off our port quarter."

"Sail that way, please."

"But that will take us back into the path of the warship we so narrowly escaped."

"We will risk it. Frankly, we want to pass the Bahamas closely, and then make a run for our final destination. Pass them, Rodwood, and we will name our port."

"Do you want to take the Emperor to certain death?" demanded the American hotly.

Boissard shrugged his shoulders.

"We of France are agreed," he replied coldly. "Pray give your orders"

"On one condition. We shall surely go under fire again, and I would save these ladies from that. Let me place them on a friendly ship——"

"Impossible!" Boissard said curtly. "Shift your helm!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CRISIS.

Rodwood paced the deck with quick, heavy steps. After useless pleading he had obeyed Boissard's orders and put Le Corbeau on her new course. Left to himself he had time to think. He was sailing into dangerous waters, and every minute was taking him nearer. The madness of it appalled him, and there was rebellion in his mind.

More than once he was seized with the inclination to rebel, to take matters into his own hands, even at the risk of being called a mutineer in all parts of the world, but he could not find due excuse for it.

He had taken command of the vessel with the promise on his part that he would obey orders. It was his duty to obey, even if he ran Le Corbeau to destruction.

Finally he mastered his overwrought nerves and became again the cool, resourceful captain. He would carry his ship through all dangers if he could. If he failed, why, he hoped to escape death. Perhaps there was some hope of that, though he could not see it.

The long reach north had taken them farther away from the Bahamas, and the day passed with the islands well in the distance. Several times other sails were sighted, but they were always small, being clearly coasters and island traders. Sometimes black crews could be seen on deck, negroes of the West Indies, and there was none in the lot with whom he dared trust his fair passengers. Had an American merchantman appeared he would have backed his topmast and transshipped them, but none was sighted.

When night fell all deck lights were kept in darkness, for he would not risk anything for the sake of them. A black ship was at a great disadvantage in times as trying as those Le Corbeau was meeting.

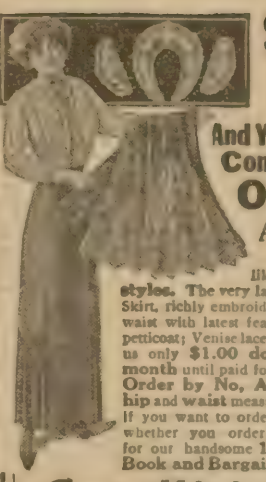
Another matter he saw to carefully. No red light should be shown this night if he could prevent it, and if one was briefly hung out of a porthole it was in his mind to seize its user and swing him up to the yards above. There could be no parleying with a traitor then.

Lookouts were stationed along the bulwarks to have constant watch for the red terror, and their orders for alertness were strict. Rodwood did not intend to have a hostile warship brought to his quarter by the unknown wretch who was so anxious to accomplish that purpose.

In spite of all fears the night was peaceful. Twice lights were seen in the distance, and plainly they were those of a ship, but not of one of large size. The red light was not burned.

Day showed no signs of trouble for some time, and the passengers ate in the cabin with composure. Rodwood went there only to swallow a hasty bite. He had secured sleep for the day during the night, and was prepared to keep his place on deck from that time.

This, he felt, was to be the critical



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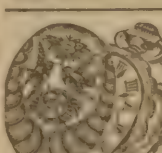

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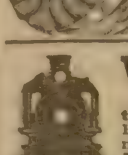

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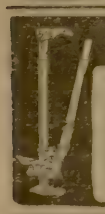

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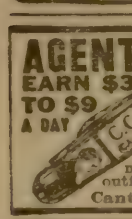

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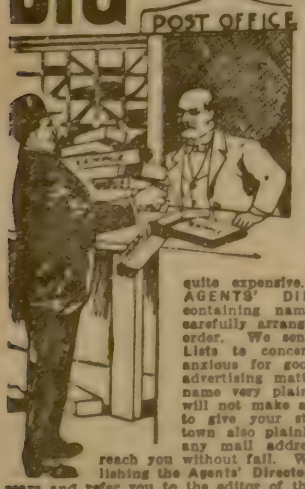

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time of the voyage. And what he expected happened.

It was eleven o'clock when the lookout reported a sail, and as she was on the port beam Le Corbeau was sent a little more to starboard. The means of getting out of the way were miserable, for every shallow of the seaboard was against it.

Nobody on board had keener eyes than Mate Breeze, and Rodwood sent him aloft with the strongest glass to get the stranger's sort. Already there was anxiety among the officers and hands, for they had their opinion of the black lump that hung in the distance, footing it toward them. According to his orders Breeze deferred his report until he had descended.

"Well?" the captain questioned.

"A warship, sir, and a big one," was the mate's report.

"Are you sure?"

"I am, sir."

"What more do you make of her?"

"I call her a first-class ship, sir. She carries a world of canvas and bristles with guns. More I can't say just yet, but an uglier customer it would be hard to find."

"She is headed directly for us. That means——what?"

"We can go closer to land, closer than she can creep with her draught."

"But not out of gunshot."

"That's the pity of it. Even if we scud along the coast as near as we can venture she will be able to bang away at us."

"Unless we boldly enter the narrow channels there."

"Just what I was thinking of, sir."

"It is our sole hope. We'll risk the channels, and if we go aground we shall be no worse off than to be hammered by yonder guns. The only question is, shall we have time to get there?"

"Things rather favor us."

"As far as we know. Still, there are big warships in the English navy of greater speed than the ship we have under our heels. It's about an even question now. If we get to that part of the Bahama waters in time to slip into a shallow way, well and good. Otherwise, it's good day for us. And it will depend upon how much speed that fellow can show."

"Are matters as bad as you say?"

The question was asked in a quiet voice close to Rodwood's elbow. He turned and saw Boissard. The Frenchman had come soft-footed, and stood gazing across the water at the strange sail. Somehow, his usual composure was a bit ruffled.

"Quite as bad as that!" replied the captain curtly.

"Then, sir, I give you permission to choose your own course from this time. Go where you will."

"You are rather late," said Rodwood stiffly. "There is now only one course open to us, or, perhaps I should say, two. We can hold on as we are, or try to enter the Bermuda channels as I indicated."

"If we hold on——"

"Granted that a hostile ship is out there, she will shoot us into bits."

Boissard moved uneasily.

"I am rather sorry we insisted upon your coming back this way."

"It's too late for sorrow, sir!" the American curtly replied.

"But the Emperor——"

"Well?"

"He will be under fire if it comes to that."

"Most certainly. He cannot leave the ship, and there is no other way but to meet the harsh fortunes that seem to be ahead of us."

Boissard made no answer, and soon moved away. Going, he lifted his head and sent a glance toward the fast-rising strange sail, and his uneasiness was plain in his face. Rodwood wondered why he was so suddenly worried.

Then minutes later a shot was fired from the other deck, the missile falling well off the bows of Le Corbeau. It was an invitation not to be mistaken, but Rodwood gave no heed. He would not bring his ship to, but would run while his masts lasted, and try to make the shallow channels that were now the sole hope.

For the stranger was a warship, and, immediately after she fired, the colors of England broke free from her peak, settling the last question. Whether she knew what Le Corbeau was or not, she intended to bring her to or do worse.

The race for land was hotly on. The fugitives strained every nerve, decking their upper works with their last yard of canvas, and wetting the sails to make them draw better at frequent intervals.

Unless they could make the channels before the chaser they were doomed.

Presently they had the first of the islands that formed the Bahama group on their starboard bow and then on their beam, but as both Rodwood and Breeze knew the way well they did not go further inshore. At that point even the smaller ship would go aground. If they were allowed time they could turn, but that time was imperatively necessary.

Meanwhile, the chaser was not idle. He, too, carried full sail, and his bow gun barked often and viciously. It had become more dangerous. Failing to bring Le Corbeau to, she was being made a target.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WOUNDED MAN.

Half an hour later Le Corbeau swung her bows to starboard and headed direct for land. In order to get there and have the aid of the shallow channels she must sail another half-hour, and it was a period black with doubts.

In the thirty minutes last past she had been bombarded fast and furiously. The enemy had proved to be the faster, and with the advantage of angles he had closed in alarmingly. For some time he had been able to fire with a degree of precision, and the result had been disastrous.

Three shots had wounded Le Corbeau. One had passed above her port bulwarks until near the bows and then dropped and torn a yawning gap just above the deck. The other two had found the rigging, and a mass of wreckage had each time rattled to the deck. Thus far nothing had interfered with the fugitive's speed, but it was an earnest of what was to come.

Rodwood, cool as ice in this hour of peril, had thought for everything. Not only did he study every chance of the chase, but he shifted the position of his passengers so they would be under less peril. For he had the Emperor and two women to guard.

The shifting of the course that brought the chase inshore was plainly understood by the warship, and with the prospect that her coveted prey would find a channel that would compel her to give up, she redoubled her efforts. Shots flew as fast as they could be fired, and the bombardment was fierce and terrifying.

It was at this time that the three Frenchmen, led by Boissard, came on deck and started to join Rodwood. Alarmed that Napoleon should risk himself the American hastened to enter a protest, but the gray-eyed man waved his hand and dismissed the subject.

"Thank you, Captain, but my place is here. It shall not be said that I was under cover when guns were thundering."

"Sire," Rodwood protested, "with their glasses they may even now be able to recognize you, and there is now no proof that they know you are here. Possibly they believe us to be a smuggler. In mercy's name, go below."

"Not while a French ship is being fired upon. Be calm, my dear sir. My place is here."

"Quite right," agreed Boissard. "Here we stay!"

Rodwood was filled with consternation, and he redoubled his arguments to carry his point, but the Frenchmen were firm. Although unable to do any good, they determined to remain where they were. And they remained.

The argument was still under way when a shot from the enemy bore upon the fugitive, crossed her upper works, and brought the mizzen topsail thundering to the deck.

It was a calamity, but not fatal. What would come next began to look like a tragedy, however, and the channel that promised so much began to look even farther away. Each moment the gap between chase and chaser was being lessened, and the foe had the range to a nicety.

Rodwood looked at his male passengers and mentally groaned.

"Mad, mad!" he muttered gloomily.

Mate Breeze sidled to his elbow.

"Shall we make it?" he asked.

"We both know the chances are against it."

"We do, but why are those Frenchmen so set to stay on deck?"

"Breeze, I am full of bewilderment, but great doubts have come to me of late. Their conduct has been very strange. Can it be that things are not as we have thought?"

"Meaning——what?"

"I don't know what. I am too much mystified. Why, I have even wondered if we really have the Emperor with us!"

"What?"

"If we have, why does he expose himself so? Why do his friends not only permit but seem to think it right? Is that man really the Emperor of France?"

Breeze gasped with astonishment. His gaze went to the gray-eyed man. Unless Napoleon had an exact double, he surely was there.

This talk was interrupted as another shot found the woodwork of hapless Le Corbeau. It wounded the mainmast a trifle and then plunged through the forward bulwark. In a stiff sea the little ship would have found it hard sailing with her multiplied wounds.

The land was now more than a dot on

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D. J. Lane, a chemist at 115 Lane Bldg., St. Marys, Kansas, manufactures a remedy for asthma, in which he has so much confidence that he sends a $1 bottle by express to any one who will write him for it. His offer is that he is to be paid for it if it cures, and the one taking the treatment is to be the judge.

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Best WATCH on Earth NOW SOLD ON CREDIT

For the first time in history the great, genuine *ILLINOIS* Watch is sold by mail on credit exclusively by us. The greatest public triumph of the age—revolutionizing the Watch business. Over 40 years the *ILLINOIS* has been acknowledged the *standard Watch worn by America's great men and women.* No one should be without an *ILLINOIS.*

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My goods sell at half ordinary retail price, and they are well known. I have customers in every town, and my sales are growing bigger every day. I've simply got to have more agents to supply my customers. I need a hundred new agents right away and this is YOUR chance to make your $25.00 to $30.00 every week of the year.

My Goods are Self-Sellers

I pay real money for your work, not trashy furniture, fake glassware or cheap plated watches, such as many houses offer. It has taken me **seventeen years** to build my business to its present great size, and I challenge the world in the matter of up-to-the-minute goods.

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I want you to go to work for me right away as agent. You need no experience. I have thousands of agents making big money. Many were formerly farmers, teachers, clerks, doctors, mechanics, laborers, teamsters and some were young folks just out of school.

I Love My Business I have sold goods myself—I started at the bottom. I spent part of my time making soaps, perfumes and toilet articles, and part of the time selling the goods. I began hiring others to help me sell and soon I had to devote all my time to manufacturing goods and hiring agents. The house of E. M. Davis Soap Co. is a live one—it knows what agents should do and it knows how to treat them.

The Position is Ready for You

I haven't space to tell you about my big factory or give you full particulars in this advertisement, but I will say this, you will never regret just sending me a postal or letter saying *"Please mail me your liberal agent's offer"*

E. M. DAVIS, Pres. E. M. DAVIS SOAP CO.
A249 Davis Block, Chicago, Ill.

IRON WITHOUT A FIRE

Cut out the drudgery. Save time—labor—fuel. No walking back and forth to change irons—always the right heat for the best work if it's an

IMPROVED MONITOR SAD IRON

Self Heating. Satisfaction Guaranteed
Over half a million Monitors in use. Strong, simple, easy to operate. Heat regulated instantly, no dirt, no odor.

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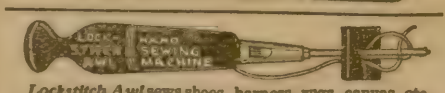
THE MONITOR SAD IRON CO.
200 Wayne Street, Big Prairie, Ohio



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TOBACCO FACTORY WANTS SALESMEN Good Pay.
Steady Work and Promotion Experience unnecessary as we give complete instructions. Piedmont Tobacco Co., Box G 14, Danville, Va

MAKES FISH BITE

Like hungry bears. Lightning Fish Lure attracts all fish. Best bait known. One man caught 20 in half hour; another, 42 in 3 hours. Try it—you'll be kept busy hauling them out. Write today. Complete fishing outfit and 2 boxes Free. Agents wanted.
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AGENTS WANTED

Sell our Big $1.00 Bottle Sarsaparilla for 39 cents.
200 Per Cent Profit
Best Seller. Finest Medicine. Complies with pure drug law. Everyone buys. Write now for terms.
F. R. GREENE, 83 E. Lake St., Chicago

the horizon. The gallant little craft was aiming for the channel like a plucky animal, and as she flung the water from her bows in the rush it almost seemed that she had human intelligence and was eager to fill her allotted mission.

Nearer, nearer, and the land, though low, rose its scant height and seemed to beckon. The blue of the deep sea was no longer visible, but had dwindled to the dark green of moderate shoals. It would not be long, if all went well, before the escape would be possible——

There was a great crashing of wood and a cannon ball plowed its way into the hull of Le Corbeau, it being her first serious hurt in that section. For this was serious, and the great crash startled Rodwood. A punctured hull was bad business.

He sent Josiah Plant, the boatswain, and Wright, the carpenter, to see what harm had been done, but they had barely disappeared when the great surprise of the voyage occurred.

Up from somewhere below staggered a reeling man, blood dripping from deep wounds. He seemed barely able to move, but his gaze was upon the three Frenchmen, and he spoke with husky ferocity.

"This is your doings!" he gasped. "You three have brought us all to ruin. You three! What are you?"

A quivering arm was flung out toward the gray-eyed man.

"You, you!" he cried, with a kind of delirious laugh. "You, Napoleon, Emperor of France! Ha, ha, ha! So am I, just as much! Oh! it is you, I mean, you—Napoleon Bildeti, so-called gentleman of Corsica. You claim to be cousin of the real Napoleon, and I suppose you are, for you look like his twin brother. But—but you have brought us all to ruin. When I agreed to further your schemes I did not realize what it would be at the crisis. Now, the crisis has come, and I am—I am a victim to patriotism. Bah! I hate the word, for I have acted the fool in following your lead. I am——"

He paused in his frenzied speech, reeled, and fell lifeless.

Rodwood turned his gaze from the wreck who had been killed by the last shot to those who remained. Especially he stared at the gray-eyed man. It had been asserted that he was not the true Napoleon, and he and his two fellow countrymen remained mute under the accusation.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT REMAINED.

Rodwood realized now that he had been a victim of cruel treachery from the beginning of his acquaintance with Boissard, and he was about to move forward to the group when another shot was received. It tore mercilessly through the rigging, and as spars, yards, and minor masts tumbled heavily down to rend the deck he abandoned his purpose.

Le Corbeau was yawing, and action was imperative. He thundered orders and the sailors obeyed with cheers. Parts of the wreckage were cast overboard and men swarmed on what was left of the yards. Le Corbeau was brought to her course again, but she was no longer the buoyant vessel of the previous half-hour.

Staggering under her hurts she plowed feebly toward the channel that had been chosen for her use.

Mate Breeze came to his captain's side.

"They are all dead!"

"If we can only have a few minutes more!" he breathed fervently. "That big warship can't come this far without going aground. A few minutes, a few minutes——"

Boissard approached, grave but calm.

"Captain Rodwood," he said composedly, "the time has come for plain words with you. You heard what was said by the man who fell dead yonder. He told the truth. The real Napoleon is not here!"

Rodwood's eyes were glittering with anger, but Boissard made a swift motion and went on hastily.

"Hear me out!" he demanded. "I am no sailor, but I see enough here to be aware that we shall all be dead men in a few minutes. Before that happens you must known the truth. Listen!

"Before Waterloo was fought it was clear to certain gentlemen of France who were devoted to Napoleon that the chances were vastly against him in the coming struggle. Even his genius could not make his army the equal of the vast numbers of the allied enemy. We foresaw defeat and captivity for him—perhaps death.

"We determined to prevent it, and planned accordingly.

"It was our idea that the Emperor should go to a safe retreat that shall here be nameless. Meanwhile, we wanted to make Wellington and his followers think Napoleon had gone an entirely different way. We wanted to bind the real trail by means of a false one.

"Because of this we prepared Le Corbeau. Yonder gentleman, Napoleon Bildetti, a cousin of the Emperor who resembled him marvelously, agreed to be the chief figure, but it was I who did the general planning.

"Monsieur, when we sailed from the French coast I took pains to leave a plain trail behind. I let it be known that—as alleged—the real Napoleon had sailed on this ship. That is why pursuit was so sharp at the beginning of our voyage. That, too, is why English warships have been hovering here to head us off.

"My trick has worked well. Long before this the Emperor must have fled to a safe refuge. We have been the decoys that made it possible."

He paused and smiled upon Rodwood with strange composure. Brief as had been his words, they coupled with the captain's own former suspicions, had been enough to give full light, so, in place of surprise, towering indignation swept over the captain.

"And," he retorted, "to carry out this scheme you have deliberately brought an American crew here to be butchered?"

Boissard spread his hands in a deprecating gesture.

"It was the fortune of war," he said evenly.

Prevost had drawn near, and he added his word now.

"Captain, you were suspicious, just before we left France, that some prowler had entered the ship secretly—this was when you were in the cove. That was right. Two men came, sent by me. One hid in the hold in a secret place especially prepared for him, while the other went ashore. He who remained was here for a definite purpose—it was to show a red light at night, whenever possible, and so draw the attention of the English ships. The man who did this lies there, dead!"

"A last word," added Boissard. "We three gentlemen of France who stand before you fully expected to be killed in this venture. We were willing to be, if the true Napoleon could be saved. We expect it now. All for France, all for the Emperor! So be it! In this serious hour, Captain, we ask your pardon if we have wronged you by deceiving you, and it is our hope that you may escape——"

It was his last word. Another cannon ball crossed the deck low and deadly. When it was gone the false Napoleon, Boissard and Prevost lay lifeless by the side of the signal-burner.

Mate Breeze was the first to recover his wits. He ran forward and grasped Rodwood's arm.

"They are all dead!" he exclaimed. "We are not French. Why not come to and surrender?"

Rodwood stirred into action like a tiger.

"No!" he cried. "To do that would be to yield ourselves a prize of war. We are near the shallow ways where yonder ship cannot go. See! she is already stripping her yards of canvas! She can go no closer, and will go no closer. If we can avoid another shot——"

They did avoid it, for, though two were fired, they fell short. Staggering like a drunken man Le Corbeau limped into the green shallows, and when, a half-mile beyond, she passed a little headland, the warship was no longer visible. Because of the boats she could lower no halt was made, and still the little vessel was urged in between islands that clustered thickly—on to safety!

* * * * * *

What followed might be told in many words, for it was much to those who participated, but it was only a sequel to what had been more exciting.

The Frenchmen were buried on a high bit of land, and Le Corbeau was jury rigged until fit for sea. Then, one dark night, she slipped clear of the Bahamas and was sent hot-footed for the United States. She made the voyage safely, and in due time dropped anchor in a Yankee port. And the triumph was all the greater because she had lost few of her crew.

History tells how useless Boissard's

(Continued back on page eleven.)

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If you intend to paint anything this season, whether your house, barn, fence or out buildings, or if you need paint for your floor, or for the inner wood work of your home, or if you need paint or varnish for any purpose whatever, **Write Us and Say** before you buy

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or visit to Dr. Rowe, the specialist, will put you in touch with his latest methods of curing **Nervous and Chronic Diseases.** He is conceded to be the most successful specialist in the country in treating those diseases.

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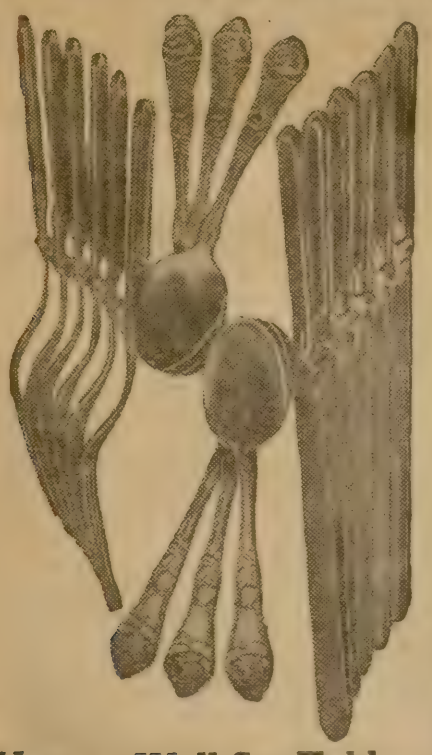

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With a subscription to the Blade and Ledger for one year, which is $2.00, we will give half of this table set, that is, three (3) knives, three (3) forks and three (3) spoons. Send us $2.00 for one year's subscription to the Blade and Ledger and we will send you the three knives, three forks and three spoons free of all charges.

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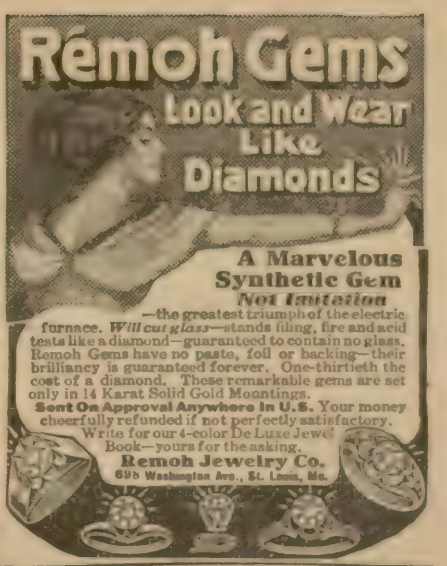

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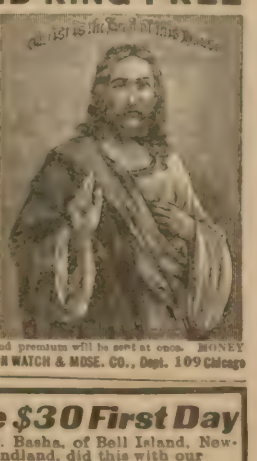

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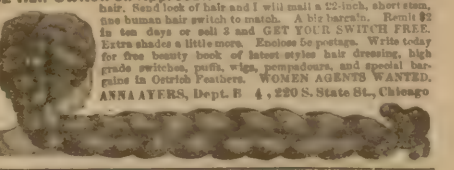

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Chicago Ledger

Entered as second-class matter June 25, 1885, at the postoffice at Chicago, Illinois, under act of March 3, 1879.

Published Every Saturday

By W. D. BOYCE CO., CHICAGO, ILL.

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Next to a circus a boy would rather see a dog fight.

If worst comes to worst it's best to make the best of it.

Telling the truth accidentally is more or less embarrassing.

Few men so live that when they die the undertaker sheds tears.

Many a self-made man acts as though he was ashamed of the job.

A wise man puts his ears on the job and gives his tongue a rest.

A lazy man's feet leave their imprint on the path of least resistance.

Yes, Cordelia, it is strictly proper to play hymns on an upright piano.

If you are satisfied to take things as they come, you won't get much.

Deception is all right on the stage, but in married life you are sure to be found out.

Only the brave deserve the fair, but lots of timid men are landed just the same.

One way to start trouble is to try to convince a coal man of the error of his weigh.

Some automobile owners are hard pressed to keep the wolf from the garage.

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SONG POEMS WANTED—Big Money in successful Songs. Entirely NEW and unequaled Plan. Send US your poems or melodies. You may be able to write a HIT. Past experience unnecessary. Publication guaranteed, if acceptable, by the world's largest, reliable Song Publishers. We pay 50%. Free Illus. Book explains our clear-cut Plan. Hayworth Music Co., 655 G, Wash., D. C.

MEN and Women Wanted for Government Parcels Post and other Government Positions. $90.00 month. Annual vacations. Short hours. Thousands of appointments coming. "Pull" unnecessary. Farmers eligible. Write immediately for free list of positions open. Franklin Institute, Dep't M 30, Rochester, N. Y.

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30 Fine Cards, 10 Cents. Comic, Friendship, Birthday, etc. Progressive Products Co., Port Byron, N. Y.

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A Sympathetic Chord.

An old colonel and a sentimental young lady were watching the sunset.

"Oh, Colonel, don't you love Longfellow's poems?" she inquired gushingly.

"Can't say that I do," he replied. "Never read them, in fact. Consider all poetry drivel."

"But," she persisted, "surely you cannot help admiring this verse of his from 'The Day Is Done,' you know:

"'And the night shall be filled with music.
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.'"

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "there is something in that! I know those Arab beggars—they would simply steal anything!"

Unchanged by Time.

They had parted years ago. Now, in the deepening shadows of Scotland's twilight they met again.

"Here be the old stile, Annie," he said.

"Ay; and here be our initials that you carved, John," she replied.

The ensuing silence was only broken by the buzzing of an aviator overhead.

Honey-laden memories thrilled through the twilight and flushed their glowing cheeks.

"Ah, Annie," exclaimed John, suddenly seizing her fair, slim hand, "ye're just as beautiful as ye ever were, an' I hae never forgotten ye, my bonnie lass!"

"And ye, John," she cried, while her blue eyes moistened tremulously, "are jist as big a leear as ever, an' I believe ye jist the same!"

Free Advertising.

At a concert for charity in a country town, Miss Carter obliged by reciting "The Village Blacksmith." At the conclusion of her recital the rural audience cheered.

"Ancower!" they cried. "Ancower!" Miss Carter was about to grant the request when a burly fellow, very much out of breath, tapped her on the shoulder.

"I've just come around from in front," whispered the man, excitedly. "I want yer to do me a favor."

"Well, what is it?" queried Miss Carter.

"It's this," whispered the intruder; "I happen ter be the feller you've been talkin' about, and I want you to put in a verse this time saying how I let out bicycles."

The Attic Prisoner

Or, A BRAVE BOY'S LUCK

By J. M. Merrill

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Begun in No. 10, March 8. Subscriptions can begin with that issue, or back copies can be obtained from news stands, our agents, or by mail from the office of publication.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STONE HOUSE.

SEVERAL days passed ere Albin again took up his self-appointed task of hunting down the mystery that hung over the house of Davenwood. The more he thought on the subject the more determined was he to learn all the particulars of the incident in the life of his maternal grandfather.

He was not long in learning that the story told him by his aunt was in a measure true. His Grandfather Bunn had been convicted of forgery, although the charge of embezzlement failed to hold. He served some years in prison, finally being let out to die, disgraced and broken-hearted. It was altogether a sad story and Captain DeVoe told it to his workman with a sympathetic sigh over the sad fate of the grandfather.

"I was never quite satisfied with the conviction of Mr. Bunn," continued the barber boss. "He had been a strong man physically up to the time of his arrest. After that he broke down entirely. Despite what he had done, Bunn had many friends."

"And you were one, sir."

"I was one, Albin."

"I can well believe that, sir," declared the boy, his voice trembling with emotion. "Aunt Octavia told me some things, hinted at others. Did you know my father?"

"Ed Vox? I knew him slightly—a square, fair, honest man as ever lived."

"And yet he married my mother?"

"Agnes Bunn! Yes, yes, and that caused trouble."

"I know," uttered the boy. "My father must have cared very much for her to marry her in the face of such disgrace."

"Sure he did, and she was worthy of it. A finer young woman than Aggie Bunn never lived," cried DeVoe. "Because her father ended his life in disgrace was no reason that his daughter should be sat down upon as well. If you don't mind, I'll tell you something about her and Ed Vox."

"Do tell, please."

The boy seemed anxious for his employer to talk on, and so Captain DeVoe opened up the past in a graphic account of the courtship and marriage of young Vox and Agnes Bunn. He told of the obstacles thrown in the way of Vox, of his stern father's decree ordering him to cease his attentions toward the forger's daughter on pain of disinheritance, of the young man's stand in defense of his betrothed, of his marriage to the girl in defiance of his father's wishes.

It seemed much like a romance and the listening boy appreciated it deeply.

"I think father was right, Captain DeVoe," said Albin when the narrator had concluded his account.

"Sure he was right, and old Vox was a curmudgeon to disinherit him in favor of that stony-hearted Octavia."

"Was Grandpa Vox worth much, Captain?"

"About half a million, my boy."

"And Aunt Octavia got it all?"

"Every cent save a dollar willed to the boy according to law. It was a mean thing to do, and I never quite forgave old Inchwood Vox for it."

"I think Grandfather Vox worse at heart than the other—Warren Bunn."

"I don't wish to sit in judgment on either, my boy."

"Nor do I," acquiesced Albin, awed and thoughtful over what he had heard.

"Now, don't take to heart anything I have said, boy," suddenly uttered the barber. "Of course, Inchwood doubtless thought Octavia was deserving, and Ed had never quite agreed with his father in many things."

"Did Aunt Octavia marry to suit her father?"

"Lord, I don't know," exclaimed the Captain. "John Davenwood was a ward politician, belonging to your grandfather's party. However, he and Octavia didn't hit it off till after the old man passed over."

"After Grandfather Vox died?"

"Exactly."

"How long ago was that?"

"Maybe two years."

"And Octavia has been married to Mr. Davenwood——"

"Less than that. As an only daughter she remained single to care for her father's house."

"Then Ulrica——"

"Is old Davenwood's daughter by a former marriage."

"Why, then she isn't my cousin after all!" ejaculated the surprised Albin.

"Not in reality," agreed the Captain.

This was news to our hero. He was not particularly sorry, however. He should think just the same of the girl even though Octavia was not her mother. In fact, the boy believed that of the two his uncle was the less culpable person.

"Uncle John is a very rich man?"

"Worth more than a million. He invested his wife's property to good advantage, besides using some of his own. He was by no means wealthy, though, when he married old maid Octavia."

Thanking his employer for what he had told him, Albin went about his work with new thoughts at work in his brain. The prisoner of the stone house meant much to him. The mystery about this man must be solved, and that at the earliest opportunity.

Albin consulted with his employer on the subject. The Captain agreed with the boy that it was a case worth investigating, and advised calling in the aid of the city detective force.

"Not yet," objected Albin. "There may be no call for my suspicions. I do not wish to create a disturbance unjustly. First I mean to find out who the prisoner is, after which, if necessary, the police shall be called in."

DeVoe so far favored his boy apprentice as to give him now and then a day off that he might prosecute his investigations.

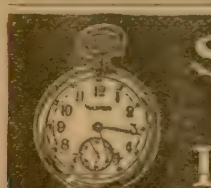
Albin visited the little shanty home of Jimmy Babbitt. He had faith in the keen wit and natural ability of the red-headed fisher lad.

"I know an old stone building on the canal," said Jim, after his friend had told of his night adventure. "It was owned by old Doc Cassford. When I was about knee high to a grasshopper the old Doc lived there. Roots and yearbs was his stock in trade and, all in all, he was a smart feller."

"Will you go up there with me, Jimmy?"

"Would a rooster crow?" chuckled Jimmy, who was very proud of his acquaintance with John Davenwood's nephew. He had even gone so far as to deride the common street boys because they weren't in touch with the upper ten of Breakwater. He was in closé communion with a millionaire's nephew; he was very intimate with one of the blue bloods of the town; he would some day wear the livery of moneycrats, sport an auto, fly high, and make the low down chaps who blacked shoes or sold papers for a living die of envy.

The two boys set out one evening, Jimmy taking the lead. They were not anxious to be known as spotters, and rather thought it would be best to avoid being seen in the neighborhood of the stone house by day, although it was not likely, as Albin said, that anybody would pay attention to the movements of two ordinary boys like them.



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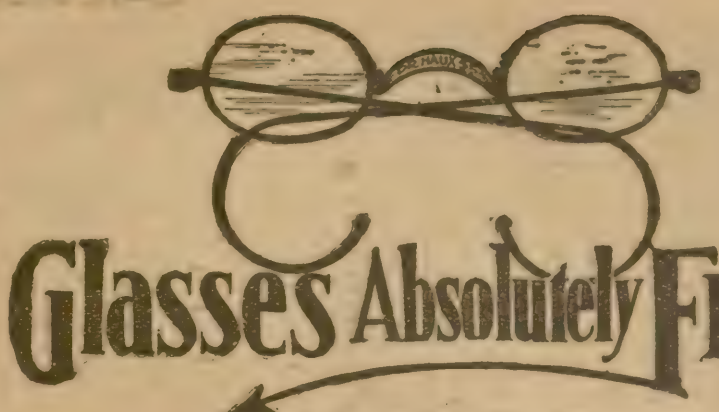

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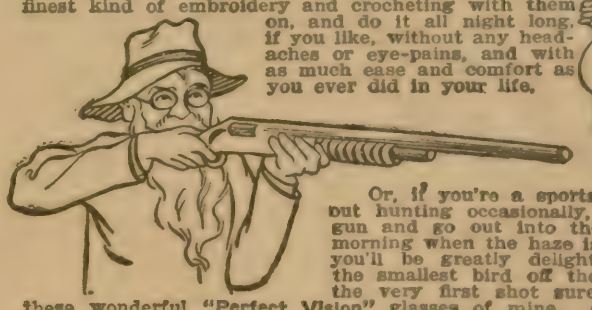

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but send for a pair at once and try them out yourself for reading, sewing, hunting, driving, indoors, outdoors, anywhere and everywhere, anyway and everyway. Then after a thorough tryout, if you find that every word I have said about them is as honest and as true as gospel, and if they really have restored to you the absolute perfect eyesight of your early youth, you can keep them forever without one cent of pay, and

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If you are a genuine, bona-fide spectacle-wearer (no children need apply) and want to do me this favor, write your name, address and age on the below four-dollar coupon at once, and this will entitle you to a pair of my famous "Perfect Vision" glasses absolutely free of charge as an advertisement.

Write your name, address and age on the below coupon at once.

$4 $4

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References: Third National Bank, Sedalia, Mo.

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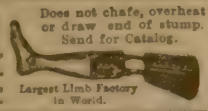

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"Fur all that I go in fur de sleuth business," declared Jimmy. "Ef we find out dem rich guys has been doin' dirt, we'll make 'em ante up, eh, Al?"

The house once occupied by old Doctor Cassford proved to be the one Albin had spied during his night adventure, and now across the entrance to the street door there hung a sign reading: "DOCTOR WHEEDLEDON'S SANITORIUM."

The boys passed on, scanning the windows which were barred with iron.

"Looks more like a jail than a 'ospital," suggested Jimmie.

"It isn't a regular hospital, Jimmie."

"What d'ye make of it, Al?"

"I can see plainly that it's a private madhouse."

"That's the stuff!" exclaimed the other. "Now one of us must go in an' make b'lieve we want to send 'em a patient—sick dad or mam, yer know."

The building presented more the appearance of a prison than what it purported to be. Albin had read of private asylums calculated for people who were in the way, and who were often confined here under the pretext that they were insane, when in fact they were perfectly sound in mind, though perhaps somewhat shaken by disease or persecution.

"Wait here," said Albin suddenly. "I have an inspiration."

He turned after having passed the house, went swiftly back, up the steps, and rang the bell.

Jimmie stood staring, yet not stirring, rather dumfounded at his friend's boldness.

"Al's runnin' a mighty resk," muttered the boy left behind.

A man came to the door after the boy had rung twice. "What's wanted?" asked the servant rather brusquely.

"I want to see one of your patients."

"Come inside."

Albin was shown to a small reception-room, given a chair, and told to wait. This he was not loath to do. After the servant was gone our hero sat grimly regarding the dingy gray wall of the room, it's severe oak furniture, and wondered if he were really in a private madhouse.

The door opened presently and a woman came in. She glanced keenly at her caller. She was tall, lean, and sharp of visage. Albin was repelled by her appearance.

"You wanted to see me?" she said softly.

"Are you the keeper here?"

"Keeper? I don't understand you, boy?"

"Aren't you Madam Botlow?"

"That is my name——"

"And you have taken in a man patient within a very few days?"

"Two of them."

"One by the name of Sam Morse?"

"I think so. That is——"

"And the other patient is one Warren Bunn, old and sick and gray, almost helpless from exposure and ill treatment. He is the man I wish to see."

The woman laughed a harsh, hissing laugh.

"Boy, what put such nonsense into your head?" she demanded.

"I know what I'm talking about, Mrs. Botlow," persisted the boy. "The man is a relative of mine, and I must see him."

"Mr. Morse?"

"No, Mr. Bunn."

"There's no Bunn here; you have been misinformed, my lad."

"All right; I will see Morse, then."

The woman wagged her gray head gravely.

"Can't I see him?"

"No; that is quite out of the question," returned the madam. "He is not in a presentable condition just now."

"He is here then? You admit that?"

"I have no call to deny it; but he is a very sick man. It is the doctor's orders to admit no one to see him."

"I will come again at another time," said Albin, getting to his feet.

"Yes, if you will," smiled the woman. "What name, please?"

"I am Albin Vox ——"

"Vox! Ah—yes—I see!"

The woman was stricken with sudden deep agitation, much to the surprise and wonderment of her boy caller.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIRE!

Albin watched Madam Botlow keenly. Her skinny face actually flushed, and something akin to fear flamed in her eyes. The boy stood watching her face wonderingly. It seemed that his name had a startling effect.

"You have heard the name before?" said he.

"Why—er—yes," she stammered.

"Maybe you knew my father?"

"No——"

"My mother, then?"

"Yes," with a quick gasp of relief. "Yes, your mother—I knew her."

Albin was distinctly interested. He began firing questions like shot from a gatling gun.

"No, no, I can't tell you anything," protested the woman. "I have seen Agnes Bunn, a wisp of a girl, pretty as a butterfly, with all the sunny nature of a humming bird, but as for anything like intimate knowledge of her after she married Ed Vox, why I know nothing."

"And my father?"

"I've seen him."

"And Grandfather Inchwood Vox?"

"He died a long time ago."

"And Warren Bunn?"

"Died soon after he got out of prison."

The speaker was still disturbed in mind, as our hero could see. While he was wondering as to its cause, a snapping sound fell on the outer air, followed immediately by a sudden brilliant glare on the windows.

"Mercy!" ejaculated the woman. "What is that?"

Albin whirled to the door which he flung open.

"Fire!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

This was the startling fact. A building immediately adjoining the sanitorium was blazing into a furious red sea. The structure was a story taller than the stone one, composed of dry, inflammable wood. The fire had got a great start, illuminating the neighborhood.

Albin ran out to look for his friend. Jimmie was nowhere in sight.

An alarm of fire was turned in. Soon the sound of the fire gong rang out, as men and horses dashed upon the scene, dragging carts and engine.

"The sanitorium is bound to go!" shouted a voice.

Madam Botlow was seemingly too frightened to act promptly. A man in uniform came to her as she stood in her door wringing her bony hands.

"If you have patients, see that they are fetched out at once," commanded the fire official.

The man servant appeared; men rushed in; doors were unlocked, and a sharp search of the house began.

Albin Vox was one among the searchers. He was looking for the man called Morse. Two sickly looking men were hustled, cloaked and hooded, into the street. The boy looked them over. Neither, he felt sure, was the the one he sought. Where was the man of the Halldene garret? Secreted somewhere below.

Shouts and rattle of fire hose floated in and over all. Albin ran to Madam Botlow, demanding the keys to the basement rooms.

"What does it matter——"

"Quick or my Grandfather Bunn may perish!" cried the boy.

"What a fool you are," sneered the white-faced keeper of the place. "The old man you speak about died years ago."

"But you said Sam Morse is here," flung back Albin.

"What of it? The building won't burn."

"It will, it will! The man must not die here!"

"That is right," growled a burly policeman. "You must open every room and let your patients out."

"Come on, then."

Sullenly Madam Botlow led the way to a small rear room on the ground floor, which had been overlooked till now.

"There's nobody in the basement," she said. "The man you want is in here. Take him out if you must."

Albin and the policeman stood on the threshold as the woman opened the door.

A gust of smoke swept from the room. The bedclothes were burning. The woman uttered a horrified cry and dashed past the boy and officer into the room. It required some effort to extinguish the flames of the burning bed.

After this was done the explorers looked about for the occupant. A big rustic chair sat near an open window unoccupied. Albin sprang to the open window and looked out. Not far off glittered the waters of the canal. Far down there moved a skiff holding two occupants.

"He's gone!" gasped the madam, sinking with a gasp of dismay into the big armchair.

"Yes, and he went out here," cried the officer pointing to the open window.

"The more fool am I!" groaned Madam Botlow. "I forgot and left it unsecured. My patient has escaped! He may have fallen and killed himself!"

"Was he strong enough to help himself, madam?" from the policeman.

"He was out in his head. When wild he was strong as a bear; at other times he hadn't the strength of a kitten."

"He may have fallen into the canal," suggested the officer.

Albin said not a word. He was deeply anxious just the same. The boat far down the canal might prove a solution to the mystery. He hoped so.

Madam Botlow led the policeman to the basement, soon convincing him that no more patients remained. Albin cornered her in the hall, demanding again the name of the occupant who had made his escape unaided, as it seemed.

"I told you the name half a dozen times, you pestilential kid!" almost screamed the madam. "Get out of here now! I want no more of your impertinence."

The firemen failed to save the building that was burning, but Wheedledon's Sanitorium was only slightly damaged.

The two inmates were again restored to their rooms, but Sam Morse was nowhere to be found, much to the distress of mind of the madam. She called the man servant, and gave him hurried instructions to hunt up the madman who had so unexpectedly taken himself away without the consent of the proprietress.

"And now you, Albin Vox!"

"Yes," said the boy, who remained till the last. "What shall I do, Mrs. Botlow?"

"You stay right here with me till the night is gone. I shan't take a minute's peace till that man is found."

"I think I had best go look for him myself," suggested the boy.

"No, I shan't permit it."

"I as a Vox am interested," declared the boy, who resolved to test the woman still further. "Don't you think I ought to see this mad prisoner of yours and John Davenwood's——"

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Madam Botlow sharply, a tinge

The woman uttered a horrified cry.

of apprehension in her voice, the boy thought.

"Just that. The man was not crazy, not an invalid, but a prisoner, held by you against his wishes and at the behest of John and Octavia Davenwood. You see I am well informed——"

"Informed nothing!" snorted the woman, now thoroughly angry. "If you keep up those insinuations I will have you arrested for slander. I can land you in the State prison if I choose."

Her threats did not move the boy. On the contrary, they only served to whet his appetite still further. He was now doubly assured that the missing patient was the late occupant of the Halldene garret, that he was held against his wishes, was, in fact, a prisoner.

"I think you have lost your prisoner for good," finally tantalized the youngster, watching the face of worried Madam Botlow from the corner of his eye. "I happen to know," venturing a guess, "that your man was not Sam Morse. That chap is still driving a rag-wagon. This man is either Grandfather Bunn or some equally important person. Now that he has escaped, I intend to see that neither you nor Uncle and Aunt Davenwood get your hands on him again."

"Don't go, boy——"

But the lad was already out of the house, hurrying from the vicinity. Albin was well assured now that he had not been misled by his intuitions. The mysterious prisoner was an important factor in the lives of his uncle and aunt. It remained for him to find out the whole dreadful business, and, if need be, place everything in the hands of the police.

Albin searched the vicinity for Jimmie. Not finding him he decided to go immediately to the young fisherman's home.

Our hero reached the humble fisher shanty on the bank of the river at a late hour. A light still glimmered from within. Before Albin reached the door, it opened and Jimmie came to meet him.

"He's here, Al!" cried the widow's son ecstatically.

"Who is here, Jimmie?"

"Why, that poor critter them devils was a mistreatin' so, as yer told me yerself," cried the other. "I got him out t'rough de winder. Had ter set a fire, but guess no harm was done——"

"Did you start that fire in the bedroom at the stone house?" gasped Albin, shocked at the cool declaration of the fisher boy.

"Mebbe I did."

"And the other—the old wooden rookery that burned?"

"Lord, no, not me," chuckled Jimmie. "That was a pure accident. It helped us out, though, in great shape, didn't it? I reckoned 'twould be a good time ter git a move on while so many folks was gittin' skeered over the big fire, so I run to the hind part of the stone house, got the man you wanted outen the winder. Wasn't that all square, Al?"

"To be sure it was," declared our hero, elated at the outcome, yet somewhat doubtful about Jimmy's part in the fire. He more than half suspected that the red-headed chap had started the fire on purpose. In any event, the outcome seemed almost, if not quite, to justify the means.

"Want ter see him?"

Yes, Albin wanted to see the patient, and at once followed his friend into the shanty, which had three rooms of small size on the ground and a low garret above.

They found the man reclining on a straw cot in the rear room. Good Mrs. Babbitt had wrapped a quilt about his shoulders, and was even now giving him a hot drink.

Albin sat down in a corner regarding the man, emaciated, hollow-eyed, and pallid, the very picture of one nearly gone with starvation or disease. The man's breast was swept by an immense white beard, which crept up to his eyes, almost shadowing his face. He looked the very picture of a grandfather, sure enough. One glance satisfied Albin that the man was not a rag-picker, as had been stated.

"May I talk with him, Mrs. Babbitt?" asked the barber boy, the moment the woman had started to go with her empty bowl.

"No," shaking her head. "Not tonight, anyhow, Albin. Poor old man! He's about petered out, and needs rest, or he will die."

At this the old man swept a feeble hand across his forehead and emitted a groan. That motion! Albin started. Somewhere he had seen it before as characteristic of some one he had known in the past.

Our hero got up and quitted the room, puzzled and mystified, half realizing that he was on the eve of a most startling discovery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NOTE FROM OCTAVIA.

Albin consulted with his lowly friends of the river shanty over what must be done regarding the old man rescued from the private madhouse.

"I s'pose the proper way would be to send him back," said Mrs. Babbitt.

"What, back to the power of Madam Botlow?" almost shouted Albin.

"Yes. Why not?"

The washerwoman stood facing Albin, one hand clasped in the other, a meek half-smile parting her lips.

"Of course," said she, "the pore ole gent is welcome to stop here as long as he likes; but you knows, law sakes, Albin, 'at we can't take no care of him—no fittin' care I mean."

"I know how you feel about it," declared the boy, "and I don't blame you a mite. But you can see the old man is ill. If he is moved again it may prove his death. I want him to live; I want him to get strong and well, and then I want him to face the folks who caused him to be shut up in a locked room like he was some wild animal. I tell you, Mrs. Babbitt, there's been crooked work and I am going to unearth it."

"Laws, Mr. Albin, you talk like a grown man. Yes, we'll keep the man for

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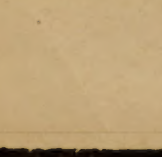

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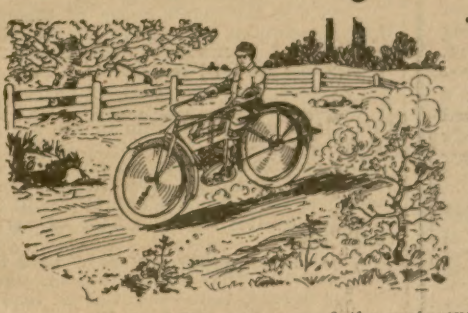

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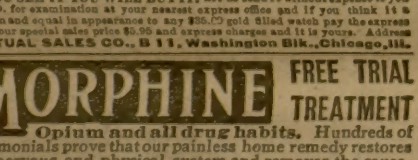

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a while, anyhow, though I do hope we shan't get into no muss on his account."

"If you do, I'll stand the damage," reassured our hero. And then Albin went forth to summon a doctor.

It was in the small hours of the night that the doctor came. He examined the patient and pronounced him weak from ill-feeding and ill-treatment. This was the verdict of a disinterested person, and it satisfied Albin that what he had done this night was justifiable in the sight of all honest people.

The old man was in no shape to converse. In fact, he was in an almost comatose state from which it would take careful nursing and the best of care to rouse him.

"I tell you frankly, my boy," said Doctor Renfield, "that man has been underfed for a long time—months, at least, if not years. His blood is illy nourished. I'll do what I can to save him, and believe I can, although," and the speaker glanced critically at the humble shanty, "this is hardly the place where he can be cared for as he ought to be."

"I'll tend to that," quickly spoke up Albin. "You do all possible to save him from death, and I'll see that you get your pay."

"Huh!" chuckled the young doctor, "that's the least of my troubles."

Two days later Albin Vox had a visitor at his lodgings.

Jacob Wisner came in after a timid rap, his thin face drawn and white. He sat down and looked wistfully at Albin.

"What is it? What has happened?" asked the young barber.

"Great things at our place, Albin?" said the choreboy.

"Tell me all about it."

Jacob opened up at once, giving a hurried account of the excited condition of Mrs. Davenwood when she learned of the fire and of the late garret prisoner's disappearance.

"They have heard all about the fire. Brandel has been up there several times and the whole push seem to be about scared to death. I thought you would like to hear about it, bein' they was your relations."

"I should say so," ejaculated our hero. "What do they intend to do about it, anyhow?"

"I've watched 'em pretty close, and I find they darsen't do much above board, but they mean to find the man who was a prisoner. They'll go about it in a quiet way, so'st not to attrac' attention. I reckon they are bad scart."

"Which proves that something is wrong," assented Albin. "Go back and keep tab on what they do, Jake——"

"I'd like to, but I can't Al." There was a choke in the lad's voice at the last.

"Can't? Why, what do you mean, Jake?"

"I've been kicked out of Halldene."

The boy bowed his head in his hands and began to cry.

"Don't do that, Jake," said Albin quickly. "I'll see that you aren't discommoded because you have lost your job. Tell me how it happened."

"Oh, Al, I'm so mad!" sobbed Jake. "I was tryin' to find out something—listenin' at a keyhole—when old Bra del and Mr. Davenwood were together, 'n' they caught me. I got a good thumpin' and was thrown out of the house, so you see I can't ever go back. I came to you——"

"Which was the right thing to do, Jake," said his friend. "You have some money saved up, of course?"

"Not a cent."

"Why, Jake, you surprise me. I thought——"

"I know, I know," whimperingly burst in the choreboy, "but mommer's been too sick to work for a week, and the boss owes me a month's wages which I can't git."

"What is that? Uncle John owes you for work and refuses to pay you?" cried the astonished Albin.

"Yes, Al, that's the truth."

"Did you ask for the pay?"

"I did, and I thought he would jump down my throat. He said I ought to be thankful that I escaped with a whole skin, which I didn't, fur he kicked some of it off my ribs when he threw me down the Halldene steps. I was so mad that if I'd had a gun I'd have shot him!"

"You don't feel that way now, do you, Jake?"

"No, but I'd do most anything to get even—and my pay."

The boy ceased his sobs and sat upright, facing Albin with a scowl.

"Never mind," began our hero, only to be interrupted by a cry from Jake, who sprang up and scuffed across the floor.

"Hold on!" cried Albin. "You mustn't go this way. Let's talk it over."

"Nothin' ter talk over, Al, not a durned thing."

"Yes, there is, too. Sit down. Don't be silly."

The choreboy obeyed the stronger mind, the two lads discussed the situation in all its bearings. It proved that Jacob had been driven from Halldene without a cent in his pocket, the ten dollars due for his last month of service being withheld because of Davenwood's anger over the spying acts of his young employe.

"I think he could be made to pay you," said Albin, "if you placed the account in the hands of a lawyer for collection."

"I thought of that myself," returned Jake.

"Perhaps even a threat to that effect might bring my uncle to terms," suggested Albin. "I'll tell you, Jake, leave it to me. Here's some money I will lend you till we find a job for you."

The speaker drew out his wallet and began counting out some silver.

"No, by gum, not a red will I take!" exclaimed Jacob, reddening visibly. "I ain't so hard up as all that, Al. We can get along somehow. Mebee I'll find work before tomorrow. Anyhow, I don't take any chink from you."

And the choreboy remained invulnerable in this stand. Albin, of course, admired him for it, and was doubly anxious to help the poor lad get a new place. The meanness of his uncle was quite a disturbing factor in Albin's mind.

"There's one more thing," said Jacob, as he rose to go, his feelings very much relieved since talking with Albin.

"And what is that, Jake?"

"I forgot to tell you that your aunt is sick."

"Aunt Octavia ill? I hope not seriously, Jake?"

(Continued on page twenty-three.)

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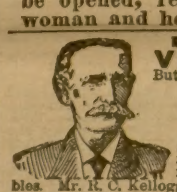

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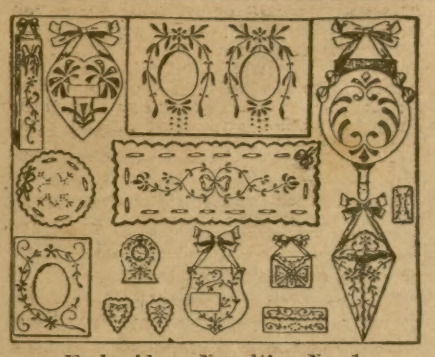

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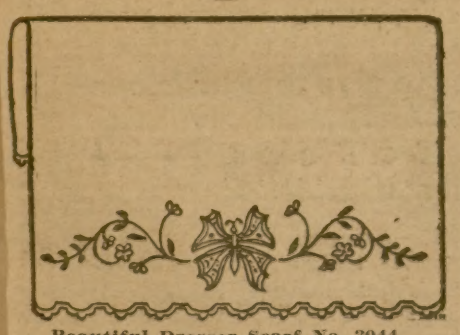

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The Attic Prisoner.

(Continued from page twenty-two.)

"Well, she's had the doctor twice now. There's something kind of queer about her. Her mind's going wrong they think."

Albin seemed impressed with this news.

"How long has my aunt been ill, Jake?" he asked.

"Well, she wasn't well a week ago, and since the fire and disappearance of the garret chap she took to her bed."

"Ill in bed!" exclaimed Albin, startled at what he heard.

"Yes, and the doctor looks mighty troubled about her," declared Jacob.

Our hero felt a bit strange, "queer," he called it, on learning that the haughty Octavia had fallen so suddenly ill.

"I heard the old duffer scolding like thunder one day. Mebbe they ain't so lovey-dovey as they might be," continued the choreboy. "You woldn't dare go over and see her would you, Al?"

"Yes," said Albin, "I would if I thought I ought. So Aunt Oc is ill. Maybe she has a conscience after all. Who knows?"

"That's a fact," coincided the other boy. "Mebbe the woman's conscience troubles her. I reckon that's what the doc meant when he said her mind was affected."

"Very likely," assented Albin.

Two days passed with Jacob out searching for work. Albin's old man at the fishing shanty down on the river meanwhile slowly improved.

One noon, as Albin was on his way to his boarding-place, a girl came out of a store and hailed him. It proved to be Daisy Davitt.

"I think you had better go over to Halidene as soon as you can, Albin," said the girl, "and see your aunt. She's real sick."

"I am very sorry," returned Albin. "Have you seen her?"

"Yes. Mamma and I were in there last evening. She was in bed looking like a dead person. I was fairly frightened."

"So bad as that," muttered the boy. "I was told that Aunt Octavia is ill, but I had no idea it was so bad as that."

"She's bad enough."

"And yet," uttered the boy musingly, "I don't think she would thank me for coming to see her. She once told me never to come near Halidene again. She talked viciously about the Bunns, and even went so far as to say that my father had disgraced the Vox family. Now, you see, I can't feel as I might, although of course I am sorry Aunt Octavia is ill."

"Oh, yes! I bet you are."

"Truly I am," asserted the boy, with a serious countenance. "I wanted to be good, to love her as an aunt, but she wouldn't let me. She don't seem to like me the least little bit."

"Well, perhaps that may be so, and yet——"

"And yet I am all the near relative she has, and her husband—Uncle John—doesn't use her any too well. Strange she should wish to make an enemy of me."

"That's what I think."

Albin parted from Miss Daisy with a pleasant word and hastened on to his noonday meal.

A few more days passed. All the time Albin was rejoicing in the slow but sure improvement of the old man of the garret. He felt sure that when he became able to talk he would reveal his identity and tell why he had been forcibly detained in the Halidene house. The boy was more than half convinced that his first suspicions were correct, and that the old man was in truth his Grandfather Bunn.

Albin thought, too, on what Daisy had told him of his aunt's illness, and he had twice started to go over to Halidene, turning back each time, undecided and at a loss to determine what he ought to do.

And then came a great surprise to the boy. A letter was dropped into his hand one evening as he was entering the Timmens house after his work. When he reached his room he opened and read:

"Dear Nephew Albin: Kindly come and see me. I am very ill and tired. Don't fail me, my boy.

"OCTAVIA DAVENWOOD."

(Concluded next week.)

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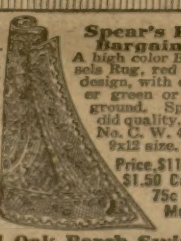

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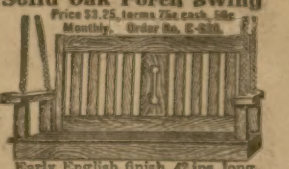

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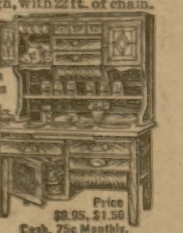

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We snuggle close on the cedarn boughs,
And give you thanks when you give us bread.

What do we do when the springtime comes?
With its greening fields and its flowers bright?
We hasten to build our cozy homes,
And warble gay songs from dawn till night.

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From the time she was big enough to remember anything May "forgot." It was not wilful forgetfulness, for she was as good as gold, but she was absent-minded. Whatever she was doing at the moment absorbed her to the exclusion of everything else. Of course, this was excellent for the thing she happened to be doing, but it was rather hard on the things she left undone.

May had many ambitions, among them the desire to be a good cook. This was one of her earliest ambitions. Since then she has grown up and other ambitions have grown with her; but at the time her laudable desire was far from fulfillment.

Her education began with a sponge cake. She was to receive instructions from a worthy woman who lived near by and to whom May's absent-mindedness was well known. So when the girl came in armed with her materials and a big cooking apron, Miss Armisted at once forestalled the greatest difficulty as she led the way to the kitchen.

"You mustn't let your thoughts wander a moment from your cake until it is safe in the pan," she said, as she steered her through a minute measuring of ingredients, for Miss Armisted was a precise person.

"You mustn't start beating until everything is ready," she said, "and, remember, the yolks and the sugar take quite a half-hour and an even, steady hand, without interruption; so don't fly off and think of something else," she ended, with a smile and a warning shake of her finger.

May began, determined to be successful in her first effort, and her thoughts never strayed one moment from the cake. It grew light and fluffy under her hand and she did not notice how dark and stormy the sky was growing outside. There was a rumble of thunder, but she paid no heed; when the lightning darted through the open window she did not notice, but kept on beating. Soon the rain came in torrents, driving everything before it, but that made no difference to May; her half-hour's beating was not over. Peal after peal of thunder crashed and shook the house, but she kept on beating; she was not afraid of thunder and lightning, and there was a certain exhilaration in working steadily through so much confusion.

One loud crash, as of falling timber, made her jump, but there was no sound following, and so she went on beating. She did not notice that she was quite alone in the kitchen, and that the water was running in rivulets over the floor, but when she had gone stolidly through the half-hour's beating she went on just as calmly with the rest of the recipe.

People and all the world outside were forgotten; all her thoughts centered in the billowy looking cake which she was now putting gently and carefully into the oven, with a hushed, rapt look upon her face, as if she were feeling the pulse of a beloved patient.

"May!"

She started up, and before she turned around she carefully shut the oven door.

"I think it's a grand success," she said, and then she caught sight of Miss Armisted's face.

"Why, what's the matter?" she said, now thoroughly aroused.

"Matter! Didn't you hear the crash?" Miss Armisted's tone was a little sharp.

"Yes—I—that is—you told me, you know, not to stop beating—so I went on—I didn't think——"

"I should think not," said Miss Armisted, severely. "Come and see what has happened; your cake is safe for awhile."

May followed meekly to the library, and what a scene met her eyes! A great piece of ceiling had fallen in, the bookcase glasses were smashed, and the storm had left its mark on everything in the room.

"Such a time as we've had, and you never even heard."

May looked so crestfallen that Miss Armisted's wrath melted away.

"I was so afraid of spoiling my cake," she explained, "and you know you said—"

Miss Armisted broke into a laugh.

"Poor little girl! I should have put exceptions to my rule. Hereafter I will say: 'May, in case of a cyclone, stop beating and find out what is the matter.'"

"Is everything ruined?" asked May. "It looks awful."

"There's more plastering than damage; but come, it is time to look at the cake. It's a monument, and we mustn't let it burn."

It came out flaky and brown, to May's delight; and in speaking of this first triumph she always called it her "thunder cake."

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